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A Heroine Of Charity

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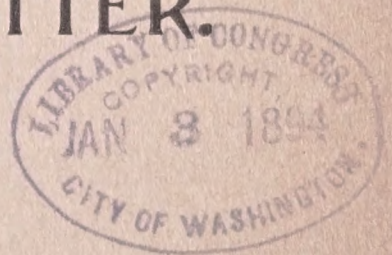
Other Stories.

A CATHOLIC STORY BOOK,

BY

MARY ROWENA COTTER.

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A HEROINE OF CHARITY.

CHAPTER I.

“On Christmas eve the bells were rung;
On Christmas eve the mass was sung;
That only night in all the year
Saw the stoled priest the chalice rear.
The damsel donned her kirtle sheen,
The hall was dressed with holly green;
Forth to the woods did merry men go
To gather in the mistletoe.
Then open'd wide the baron's hall
To vassal, tenant, serf and all;
The fire with well dried logs supplied,
Went roaring up the chimney wide;
Then was brought in the lusty brawn,
By the old blue-coated serving man;
Then the grim boar's head frowned on high,
Crested with bays and rosemary;
Then came the merry maskers in
And carols roared with blithsome din.
England 'was merry England, when
Old Christmas brought his sports again.
'Twas Christmas brewed the mightiest ale;
'Twas Christmas told the merriest tale;
A Christmas gambol oft did cheer
A poor man's heart through half the year.”

Sir Walter Scott.

CHRISTMAS eve had come, and with it had come one of the severest storms that had visited southern England for years. All day the sky had looked dark and threatening, but very little snow

had fallen until just before dark, when a wild storm had set in, and in a short time great drifts were piling up everywhere around the village of Torrence. Torrence, for such I have chosen to call the place, was the home of Lord Ashleigh, the only surviving son of a large and aristocratic English family. The western part of the village was composed mostly of cottages, and standing in the midst of these, like a huge giant was a stately old mansion, the home of the lord. Most of these cottages, and also many in other parts of the village, belonged to his estate.

As night drew on the fury of the storm increased, and the darkness was something that would fill with awe any one who chanced to be out alone very late. It was one of those dreadful nights on which so many dark deeds are committed, and the criminal finds such easy means of escape, often never to be found.

Driving from our minds all thoughts of the gloom outside, let us take a peep in at some of the windows as we pass the cottages on our way to the mansion. While the chill December winds are blowing without our eyes are greeted by many merry scenes inside. Bright fires are glowing upon the hearths and in many of the cottages the Christmas candle has been lighted in anticipa-

tion of the midnight visit from the Infant Saviour, while the people seem to know nothing but happiness—and why shouldn't they be happy for these simple peasants have for many weeks looked forward to the morrow, first, because it was the greatest holiday in all the year and second on account of a great event in the history of their village which it was to bring near. Some of them have retired for an hour or two's rest, before it is time for midnight Mass but most of them sit up to wait for that hour. The children have all gone to bed after having lisped their simple evening prayers and are now sweetly dreaming of the little Infant Jesus about whom they have heard so much for the past few weeks or of Santa Claus and their stockings hanging by the chimney.

As we near the mansion, our ears are greeted by the sound of music mingled with Christmas carols and now and then a merry peal of laughter, which tells that all is mirth and joy inside. The large old fashioned hall from which these sounds of merriment proceed is brilliantly lighted. A huge yule log is brightly burning upon the hearth, the mistletoe bough hangs over the main entrance, wreaths of holly and evergreen adorn the wall with here and there an old fashioned portrait of some honored members of the family perhaps long

since departed. Two or three of these had made their names almost immortal by victories won on the battle field and above their pictures hung the weapons which they had so gallantly used.

The hall is thronged with many noble guests, relatives of the family and a few very intimate friends, for Christmas was a time when Lord Ashleigh always gathered together everyone to whom either he or his wife could claim any tie of relationship, and Christmas eve at his home was always the merriest night in the whole year. He wished to spend this night in old time English style and nothing was too good for his friends who always received the heartiest welcome.

The most prominent person among that gay throng was the lord's only daughter, Inez, a lovely, fair-haired, blue-eyed girl of twenty-one. It was on her account that great pains had been taken to make the festivities of this Christmas eve greater than they had been for many years, for the day after to-morrow she was to be married to Walter Tracy, a young army officer just home from India.

Although six years older than herself, the young man had been one of her dearest friends in childhood, having been brought up with her, and as they grew older, what had once been only a

mere childish attachment, ripened into a mutual affection. Walter's parents, who had always been very intimate friends of the Ashleigh family, dying when he was only ten years old, had left their only child in the lord's care, and Inez soon learned to look upon him as an older brother. No brother and sister could have been more attached than were these two children during the years that they spent together. She was fifteen when he left home to spend a few months in southern Europe and Egypt. She parted with him as she would with a brother, begging him not to forget his sister when he was so far away, and not to remain very long. He told her that he would think of her often, and would return home in a short time.

For a while after his departure she missed him very much, but as the weeks and months went by she began, like a child, to count the days that would elapse before his return; but poor Inez; she did not dream of the disappointment in store for her, and only those who have watched and waited for the return of some dear one — who is far away — and who, it sometimes seemed would never return, can know how lonely she felt when the day of the expected arrival drew near, and she learned that he was not coming home. Their

correspondence had been like that between an affectionate brother and sister, and in some of their letters they had addressed each other as such. Inez had one only brother at home, but he was not yet nine years old, and had never been the companion to her that the absent one had been.

The day before Walter was expected had come and she was very happy in thinking what a welcome she would give him and hoping that he was coming home to stay when a letter came from him post-marked at Calcutta. His last letter had been written from Athens, and now when she believed him to be so near home, she could hardly understand the meaning of this letter coming from India. Her worst fears were confirmed when she read that he had enlisted in the British army and would not be home for some time. This had been one of his reasons for going away, but knowing how attached Lord Ashleigh's family were to him, he had refrained from letting any of them know of his plans excepting the lord himself to whom he disclosed them a short time after his departure asking advice of him as he would of a father and requesting him to keep his secret until after he had enlisted.

Alone in her own room that night, Inez shed many lonely tears over the letter from her brother

who was so far away and who, perhaps, would be killed in a foreign land where she would never again see him. Oh, why did he do it and would he ever return home, she asked herself again and again, thinking not of the honors after which he aspired but of the dangers surrounding him.

Four years passed after Walter's enlistment, and having received a few weeks leave of absence, he arrived home quite unexpectedly one bright summer's day bringing with him high honors which he had won by faithfulness to duty.

Many and true were the friends that the young soldier had made while abroad, but none were as dear to him as those he had left in dear old England. All the old friends seemed unchanged to him excepting the tall fourteen year old boy whom he met at the gate as he was entering the grounds and the little sister, as he loved to call Inez, about whom he had thought most. Her image had been uppermost in his mind during the five lonely years of his absence and it was mostly to see her that he now came home. He had noticed the change gradually come over her by her letters which had grown fewer and shorter than they were at first and he sometimes wondered as he read them over and over again if some proud rival was the cause of this apparent strange-

ness. "No, it cannot be so," he would say to himself for he could only think of Inez as he had last seen her, and he was hardly prepared to find her changed as much in appearance as she had. No longer the merry laughing child of fifteen that he had left her, our heroine had grown to a beautiful and dignified young lady who was already beginning to win many brilliant friends and who bade fair to become one of England's fairest and most adored queens of society. Despite of all her rare advantages she was not spoiled for she possessed a noble intellect combined with a loving disposition.

Had Walter returned home when he was first expected four years before, Inez would in all probability have run to meet him with open arms, telling him how glad she was to see him. Now she met him almost coldly, (so it seemed to him,) but told him he was welcome home and she hoped he had come to remain. Her dignity at first almost grieved him, but in a few days it seemed in part to die away, and she became more like the Inez of old. They were once more the companions they had been in those days. Together these two often drove through the country, and rowed on the river that crossed the Ashleigh estate, visited the scenes so dear to them in child-

hood, sometimes accompanied by friends or members of the family, together they strolled by moonlight through the grounds during the long summer evenings, or joined the family on the veranda, or in the parlor. These were bright and happy days for the two young people, but they were not of long duration, for before the summer was over Walter was obliged to return to his post of duty but not before he had won from Inez a promise to become his bride. This promise was sealed by the consent of her parents, whose one great hope had been to see their daughter married to the son of one who had been one of their dearest friends. Before Walter had been left an orphan, the two fathers had planned this wedding, hoping in this way to join two of the oldest and most aristocratic families in England, Walter being the only heir of the Tracys, while Inez, then the lord's only child, was the only descendant of the Ashleigh family.

Little over a year later, Walter's time in India having expired, he hastened home to claim his bride, and great preparations were made for the wedding which was to take place during the Christmas holidays. It was talked of everywhere that the Ashleigh or Tracy families were known, and many looked forward to the great

event. Not only were the preparations being made at the home of Lord Ashleigh, but also in a beautiful mansion on the suburbs of London, which, for many years, had been in possession of the Tracy's, but had been closed since a few months before the death of Walter's father. It was now opened and being refurnished for the young couple who, after a short honeymoon in southern Europe, were to make their home there during the winter, while the summer months were to be spent at the old Tracy homestead, an old fashioned but pleasant place a few miles from Torrence.

The young officer was almost a constant companion of his affianced during this Christmas eve and many were the admiring glances cast upon them, and the compliments paid them as they passed through the great hall. She, fair and slight, the picture of maidenly grace and beauty; he, tall, dark, and stately, a handsome man and a perfect soldier in every respect. How well fitted they were for each other everybody said, and what a happy event their marriage would be. Lord Ashleigh heard all of these remarks and listened to them with no slight feeling of pride. Even the bride elect herself could have been scarcely happier than he, for in her marriage

was to be accomplished one of the greatest dreams of his life, namely, to have his child bear the honored name of Tracy.

The evening was quite far advanced when supper was announced, and the party were soon seated around a well-filled table, Walter and Inez occupying places near the head of the table on the right of Lord Ashleigh. The meal was a very pleasant one, for all present did their utmost to contribute to the mirth of the evening; toasts for the happiness of our young friends were drank by all present, and there was not one who did not join in wishing them many years of undisturbed bliss. Not one, I said, but still even in that select circle of dear friends and relatives, a Judas sat and drank with the others—drank the happiness and long life of his own intended victim.

The meal was over but the company had not left the table when the bell in the tower of the neighboring chapel began tolling for midnight Mass. All arose at the sound and left the hall soon returning arrayed in hats and wraps. A procession was formed and they marched to the chapel which, on entering, they found nearly half full of peasants from the neighboring cottages. Among a profusion of flowers many of which

Lady Ashleigh had sent from her own conservatory to adorn the altar, burned scores of wax tapers, and one glance at the crib, (Inez's gift to the church), would almost make one believe they beheld the stable at Bethlehem. The image of the divine child lying on the straw in the manger, his blessed mother and foster father, the three kings from the far east and the shepherds looked as if they were living, while the animals had on their faces an almost human expression of tenderness and sympathy for the infant. Figures of angels suspended from the ceiling of the cave too were there and the soft rays of the candles and different colored lights gave it a very beautiful aspect.

The old parish priest soon appeared on the altar robed in white vestments and behind him walked his assistant, a newly ordained priest, and several scarlet robed altar boys. The deep rich tones of the organ resounded through the edifice and the singing mingling with it filled the hearts of all with joy and gladness, especially the "Gloria," that dear old hymn first sung by angel voices on the night that Christ was born. There was not one present whose heart was more thrilled with joy by these words than the young girl who so soon was to bid farewell to her maidenhood days.

“Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis,” Gloria be to God on high, and on earth peace to men of good will). How these words resounded again and again in her heart, and in her happiness she felt that in the whole world there could not be a person who knew the meaning of them that could have anything but the most sublime feeling in their hearts, especially if they could hear them sung as she had just listened to them. Alas, poor Inez, little did she dream of the cold hard hearts that could not be moved even by the most sublime words for in her happiness she thought of nothing but peace and love. As the sweet words the “Adeste Fideles” sounded in her ears, she sank deeper and deeper into her reverie until it seemed as if angel voices were singing as the shepherds had heard them from the plains of Bethlehem eighteen hundred years ago. All, all, was forgotten by our young heroine now and as she knelt there, almost unconscious of the presence of any one, with her eyes fixed upon the tabernacle, she wondered how any one could feel such undisturbed bliss as she now enjoyed.

When the Mass was over the assistant priest spoke a few touching words on the birth of the Saviour, who, for the redemption of mankind, had

come into this world, leaving the joys of Heaven, to be born in a manger on a cold December night, and to live and die as one of the lowliest of His creatures. The congregation was then dismissed, and when, after a farewell prayer they left the holy place, they almost felt as if they had seen the Infant Saviour and received his blessing.

The company returned to the hall, where they stopped for a few minutes to exchange a merry Christmas before retiring to their own apartments. Walter Tracy was standing in front of one of the windows talking with a friend named Sir Edward Sarsdale, when the report of a pistol was heard. Walter staggered and would have fallen had he not been caught in the strong arms of his friend. The ball, which had been fired by some one outside had struck him, and he had every appearance of death. Inez had been in a distant part of the hall, but she was at his side in an instant, and as Sir Edward was about to lay him on the floor she lifted his head on her lap. The crowd gathered about him, and it was with much difficulty that a physician who was among the guests made his way to him. It was whispered that he was dead, but Inez, who had wonderful control over herself, insisted that he still breathed. The doctor motioned them to keep back and be

silent; then putting his ear to the victim's breast said that he still lived, but the room must be cleared or he would smother.

“Let two of you carry him to a bed,” he said, “and the others must leave the room.” The order was obeyed, and Walter was taken to one of the servant's rooms, a little chamber just off from the hall. On examining the wound the physician found that it was a fatal one, and although there was little chance of the patient's living more than a few hours, he hardly dared to tell the truth to the dear friends anxiously waiting for him to speak. Beside him stood Lord and Lady Ashleigh and their son with white and anxious faces; but saddest of all was the sight of the young girl, whose pale blue dress was covered with stains of fresh blood.

Walter had been unconscious since he fell, but a few minutes after the examination he opened his eyes and asked what had happened, but before anyone could answer he began talking as in a delirium: “Yes, I know how it was now,” he said, “I am very badly hurt. I have been dreaming that I was back in India and had been on the battle field all day. Scores were falling on every side of me and my own horse fell dead from under me, but I, as if possessed of a charmed life escaped

unhurt. I was sitting outside my tent in the evening talking over the day's victory with a few surviving comrades when a murderer coming from behind shot me and I fell." He ceased speaking for he was very weak from loss of blood and the great drops of perspiration on his forehead told only too plainly that death was near at hand. "He is failing fast," the physician whispered to the lord, "and we had better call the priest at once."

"Yes, send for the priest," said Walter, who had overheard the doctor's words despite of the precaution he had taken to keep them from him, and I would like to have a lawyer to draw up my will." Inez turned deathly pale at these words but she neither spoke or shed a tear.

The priest who had been called in and was waiting outside the door for the summons now entered and the young man was left alone with him to make his peace with his creator. In a few minutes the physician and the family of Lord Ashleigh, the only ones permitted to see the dying man, were called in to be present when he received the last sacred rites of the church. They all knelt and Walter himself joined in answering the prayers said by the priest. He seemed to have gained a new strength and had no fear of the approaching end. This over, the village attorney who in the

meantime had been sent for was called in to draw up the will in which the entire Tracy estate with the exception of a few hundred pounds given to charitable institutions was bequeathed to Inez. The young girl would have protested against receiving his property but she knew that he was dying, and to argue with him besides being useless would only cause him pain; furthermore Walter being the sole owner and only heir to the estate it would necessarily go to strangers after his death.

Walter now called Inez to his side, and as she knelt at the head of his bed he clasped her right hand, which he held firmly until after death, when his stiffened fingers were unlocked from around it. "Inez," he whispered, "there is one thing I wish to ask you, a promise I want you to make. Will you make it?"

"Yes," she said, "I will not refuse anything you ask."

"It is this," and his voice grew fainter, "that you will forgive my murderer with your whole heart, as I forgive him, and hope that God will forgive me; pray for him that he may repent, and God may forgive him; not only that, but if he is ever found and tried, promise me that you will never appear in the court against him."

It was a hard promise to be made by one who had

been robbed of so much by a cowardly assassin, who appeared to have no motive for his crime, for she knew well that Walter was honored and loved by all who knew him; but who can refuse to comply with the last request of a dear friend whose lips, as he asked that favor, were already stiffening in death? With a trembling voice Inez said "Walter, for your sake I promise all you ask." A look of joy covered his pale face, and he pressed her hand to his lips. Before he could speak she whispered something in his ear. No one knew what it was, but it caused that bright look to again light up his features. "Thank you, Inez," he said, "you are a brave girl, and may God bless and give you happiness." Turning to the rest of the family he said, "and you too, I could never thank you enough for all your kindness to me since the death of my own dear parents, for you have been all to me that you could have been. May God bless you, and grant that we may all meet in Heaven."

The priest, seeing that the end was near, commenced the prayers for the dying. All joined in answering them, and Walter's voice might be heard now and then in broken accents as he tried to join them. The prayers over, Walter said in a low but distinct voice, while his eyes rested upon a crucifix on the wall. "May God forgive the one who has

caused my death." These were his last words, and in a few minutes more his soul was with its Creator, where it still continued pleading for forgiveness.

"He is dead," said the doctor, advancing toward the bed, to lead Inez away; but with his last breath she had swooned, and her head lay on his pillow. What a melancholy picture it was, that the first grey streaks of light on that Christmas morning fell upon, as they stole in through the window. Side by side were these two, who, less than eight hours before had been wished many years of happiness; he, cold in death; and his bride elect, kneeling senseless at his side. Tenderly they raised her and carried her to her own room, where all day she lay in a stupor, realizing nothing that passed around her.

How sad it was for this brave young soldier who had been in the fiercest of battle seeing comrades fall on every side and still escaping unhurt to die now at the hand of a cowardly murderer far away from the field of battle with no laurels to cover his grave. Not from his country, but we doubt if there are many in his position who have received brighter laurels of immortality above, than the soldier who in all things had remembered what he owed to his God as well as to his country. Although his position had exposed him to many

dangers and temptations, he had led a very exemplary life and was always prepared to meet his Creator, for as he often said the life of a soldier is full of dangers and he knew not at what moment he might be called from this earth.

He died not on the battle field,
Nor by the sword he fell,
But he was murdered by the side
Of the maiden he loved so well.

For five long years he'd bravely fought
Upon the battle field.
He'd led a gallant English band
To the foe he would not yield.

A shining light he'd been to them,
To those soldiers strong and brave,
While they were thinking of this earth
His thoughts to God he gave.

He left them for to claim his bride
The one he loved so dear,
Little dreaming while by her side
That the hand of death was near.

But jealous eyes were on him bent
As by her side he stood,
And ere their wedding day had dawned
For her he shed his blood.

No laurels crown his earthly tomb
To tell of battles won,
But wreaths of immortality
By angel hands are spun.

CHAPTER II.

AS soon as Walter had been removed from the hall after being shot, a party of the gentlemen guests started out in search of the one who had fired the shot. The band was headed by Sir Edward Sarsdale, the young gentleman who was talking with Walter when he fell. His home was in London and he was one of the lord's most intimate friends, one who always took a prominent part in all the social gatherings at his home and was considered a very important personage by all of the family excepting Inez, who, while for her parents sake had always treated him well, had from her very first acquaintance with him. When she was but a mere child she felt a secret dislike for him which she could not fathom and she had often wondered how her parents could be so attached to him. Although always very cordial and pleasing in his manners, he at times seemed to her to be cold and unfeeling and she sometimes thought this was why she dreaded him so.

The place just outside the window where the assassin had probably stood when he fired the shot was first examined but the snow had already drifted

so as to nearly fill the tracks which could be traced but a short distance then disappeared in the drifts. To add to the difficulty the night was very dark and the wind blew in such gusts that the torches could not be kept burning. The whole of the grounds and all of the out-houses on the place were searched but to no avail. The party also went through the entire village visiting many of the cottages to see if the murderer had taken refuge in any of them but with the same ill luck. The day had already dawned when after raising great excitement all over the village the party returned to the mansion to report the fruitlessness of their search and to learn that Walter Tracy was dead.

The chapel during Mass on that Christmas morning was not as full as it had been in former years and the minds of many who were present were not on the divine mysteries being enacted on the altar, or, altogether on Bethlehem's babe, for the knowledge that a murder had been committed in their peaceful village filled them with horror and they could think of nothing else. When their prayers were asked for the happy repose of the soul of the departed one, there was scarcely a dry eye in the church and all joined in a heartfelt prayer. These simple peasants had long looked forward to the wedding of the young girl who had been brought

up in their midst and had always been so dear a friend to them. It was to have been a great day in the history of their village and the night before while her health and happiness was being drunk from silver cups and costly glasses in her own beautiful home they had drunk it with loving hearts from their humble boards,—but now that wedding was never to take place.

But to return to the mansion,—The rooms which had been so handsomely decorated for the Christmas holidays and for the wedding had all been closed excepting two large parlors which were separated only by a wide arch hung with heavy silken draperies. These were darkened so as to admit scarcely any light from the outside and were draped in mourning for it was here that the body of Walter Tracy lay in state. In the further end of the inner room he lay in a plain black coffin. Forming a sort of a canopy over the head of it were two English flags draped in black. A crucifix also stood at the head of the coffin and on each side were three tall wax candles. There was not a flower in the room. The deathlike stillness would almost make one think they were in a vault, notwithstanding the frequent visits paid the room by many of the people from the cottages as well as those in the mansion who came to take a fare-

well glance at the face of one whom many of them had known from childhood and to offer a prayer for him.

It was here that Inez came alone the morning after Christmas at the same hour when she was to have been married. She brought with her a bunch of white roses tied with a white ribbon and laid them on the coffin lid. They were the flowers that had been intended for her bridal bouquet and it was she who stole away to the conservatory on leaving her room that morning and plucked them when no one saw her to bring them here. She stood for a few minutes gazing upon the marble features of the sleeper, then fell upon her knees beside the coffin there to renew the promises made Walter just before his death and to pray for strength to keep them. For a long time she knelt there in silence with no one to disturb her, and not a sigh fell from her lips or a tear from her eyes. One of the guests was about to enter the room but seeing her there had closed the door softly and remained outside as a guard to keep all intruders away until he heard her approaching the door then he went away unobserved by her. After one last lingering glance at the pale face she had not seen until that morning she returned to her own room which she did not leave again until the morning of the funeral.

The next morning the young soldier was taken to the chapel, which was crowded to overflowing not only with those living in the village and neighboring country, but also many friends and brother soldiers who had come a long distance to pay their last tribute of respect to the one whose wedding they had hoped to attend. A solemn requiem Mass was sung by the old parish priest; a young priest who had once been a schoolmate and dear friend of Walter's acting as deacon, and the curate as sub-deacon. At the close of the funeral services the young man was borne to the family burial lot, where he was laid beside his parents. The lot was now full, for the last of the Tracy family was gone. Inez had controlled herself with a superior strength during it all, never shedding a tear until the coffin had been lowered into the ground, and the first shovel of earth thrown upon it. The sound seemed to arouse her as if from a stupor, and with an agonizing cry she broke into a passionate flood of tears and fell helplessly into the arms of her brother, who stood by her side. She had to be carried home, and for several days she neither left her room, or saw any one except her own family and her maid.

In the meantime the search for the murderer had continued day and night, but as yet nothing could be found out. Two skillful detectives from

London had arrived the day after Christmas and went to work with a strong will to clear up the mystery. They worked diligently for several weeks, disguising themselves in every way, and visiting every part of the country without finding any clues, until at last, when they were about to give up the search as fruitless, suspicion fell upon a strange young man who had been working in Torrence during the winter. Many of the people of the village had endeavored in vain to find out who he was, or whence he had come, and his silence about his history had naturally caused him to be disliked by many of his associates. It was rumored that he had left the village on Christmas eve a few hours before the murder had been committed, and did not return for four weeks. He looked much thinner and paler than when he went away, and when asked where he had been he refused to tell.

Suspicion at once naturally fell upon him; but when the charge was made against him he denied it, saying that he had left town four hours before midnight, and had heard nothing of the murder until his return. His story was not believed, so he was arrested, had his trial, and as he still refused to tell where he had been, and no one could be found who had seen him since he left his boarding

place that night, the evidence was against him, and he was condemned to die. When he received his sentence his only words were that he was innocent, and the taking of his life would be as foul a deed as the murder of Walter Tracy had been. Inez had visited him in prison, and after having a long interview with him had pleaded with the judge for his life, saying that she believed him to be innocent. She was severely reprimanded for her persistency in declaring him innocent, and many were the cruel remarks passed about her, for nearly every one in Torrence believed him to be guilty, but she bore them all, and remained faithful to her own convictions.

Two weeks passed after his trial and the eve of his execution had come. Early in the morning he was to be beheaded, but still Inez seemed to retain hope that he might yet be saved. In the evening the village sheriff sat alone in his room when two callers were announced who wished to see him on very important business. "Show them in here," he said to his daughter who had told him they were there. Inez entered the room accompanied by a young girl of about eighteen who bore a striking resemblance to the condemned man. "I have come," said Inez, advancing toward him, to prove—."

“Never mind,” said the sheriff in a tone of impatience, “I know what you have come for but it is of no use for the evidence is so strong against that youthful assassin that we all know him to be guilty and to-morrow he must atone for his crime.”

A low cry broke from the lips of Inez’s companion whom the sheriff had not noticed before. “The man whom you call the assassin,” she exclaimed “is my brother. He shall not die for he is innocent of the crime you accuse him of and I have come to prove it.”

The sheriff looked up in amazement and said, “you his sister; who are you and whence did you come. Tell me why your brother has acted so strangely in refusing to answer any questions about himself. “I shall be glad if you can prove that he is not guilty for no one regrets to see him executed more than I but bear in mind it will be a very difficult thing for you to do as the evidence against him is very strong and we do not want you meddling with the case unless you can give the strongest proofs. Now let me hear your story.”

The girl told that “she and two brothers were the only children of a once wealthy family but her father had recently lost the greater part of his property and died leaving them almost penniless

but his poverty was not known to the world. Her elder brother had joined the British army and only the younger one was left to support her. Since her father's death she had been living with an aunt in a small village about fifteen miles from Torrence. Her younger brother wishing to hide their poverty from the world and to support himself and help his sister whom he did not wish to be entirely dependent upon her aunt, had gone to Torrence to work where he was unknown and where he bore an assumed name. On Christmas eve he had met his aunt's coachman about a quarter of a mile from the village and drove to her home where he intended spending Christmas and was to return to Torrence the day after. On Christmas he was taken severely ill and was not able to leave his room until a few days before his return to Torrence. He had heard nothing of the murder until he was arrested for it. His sister did not learn of his imprisonment until this afternoon when Inez drove to her aunt's home and after breaking to her as gently as she could the news of her brother's sad misfortune brought her to Torrence but refrained from telling her that he had been condemned to die until they reached the village.

The young man had resolved at first to keep his identity from every one but would have told who

he was when he received his sentence had not the evidence been so strong against him that he felt it would be of no use now and if he must die he would die unknown. When Inez came to him she with the others thought him guilty and she wished by telling him of Walter's forgiveness to draw him to repentance. She, the one above all others who should have despised him, was the first one to show him any kindness, so after denying the charge to her, he told her his story and so earnest was he in the recital of it that he at once excited her sympathy and she begged him to tell the authorities but he refused, saying he knew it would be useless.

"If they knew who your friends were, and where to find them," she argued, "I am certain they would visit them, and learn from them that you were not here that night."

"I fear that they might not believe my friends," he answered, "for it would seem almost impossible for me to drive such a distance on that stormy night, and reach home before midnight. I believe we were the only ones who were out in the country that night, for but few would have dared to face the storm. You see if I tell who I am there is little chance of my being saved; and if I die, it will be to leave a stain upon my family

name. No, it is better that I should remain unknown."

That day he received his sentence, which was to be carried out two days later. The next morning he sent for Inez and asked her to carry a message to his sister after he was dead, and told her the way to his aunt's home. He handed her a letter, charging her not to let any one know she had it, and not to deliver it until after his death. She hurried from the prison, and going home, ordered the coachman to see that her favorite pony was ready for her directly after noon, as she wished to drive out alone in the country. She took the road laid out to her by the prisoner, and after what seemed to her a very long drive, at last reached his aunt's home, and it was from there she had just now returned.

The prisoner sat alone in his cell in the morning awaiting his summons to the executioner's block, when he heard footsteps in the hall. For the first time since he received his sentence a feeling of dread came over him, for he now felt that the time had come for him to die alone and he would never again see his dear sister, but soon his dread was turned to happiness by the announcement that he was to have a new trial in a few days. The result of the trial was that his innocence was

proved, and after thanking Inez for saving his life he returned with his sister to his aunt's home.

Inez was now pronounced the heroine of the village, and those who had scorned her only a short time before now honored her for her nobility in saving the life of the accused, and it was with a feeling of shame that they recalled the bitter remarks they had made about her.

The detectives who had returned to London were again recalled to Torrence, and set about once more to find the murderer, and after working for some time without finding any clues, at last gave up search as fruitless. Inez, from the first, had been kept in a state of fear and anxiety as she silently watched the work of the officers. She almost longed, at times, to see the murderer captured and punished according to the full extent of the law; then remembering her promise to the dying that she would forgive him, and never appear against him, she would pray that he might never fall into the hands of the authorities, but be brought to a true Christian repentance. After the release of the accused man she hoped to see the murderer captured in order to more fully prove the innocence of him on whom the suspicion of some of the villagers still hung.

No one appeared to be more interested in the

case than Sir Edward Sarsdale, who seemed very anxious to have justice done, and wished to remain near Torrence until that wish could be gratified; but to his great regret he was called away to the continent quite unexpectedly, and did not return for three years. His last words in bidding Lord Ashleigh good-bye were that he hoped soon to hear that the mystery had been solved, and the crime avenged.

When he returned the mystery was still as deep as when he went away; but it had almost passed into oblivion, now being seldom thought of, excepting by those most interested in it, and even they had little or nothing to say concerning it.

It was early in the month of March that Sir Edward arrived at the mansion as unexpectedly as he had gone away three years before. He received a warm welcome from Lord Ashleigh, who told him he hoped he had come to make them a long visit after so long an absence; but as he had not yet seen his mother, who was away from home when he stopped in London; he remained only two days but promised to return after a short visit to his home.

Inez was one of the first persons he met at the mansion on his arrival, and he was greatly surprised to find how changed she was. No longer

the happy, light-hearted society belle of three years ago, but a broken-hearted woman whom he soon learned lived no more for herself, but for the good she could do for those around her. Her friends were the poor and the needy, while she seemed to care not for the company of those in better circumstances. She spent more time now in their cottages than in her own home, helping the peasants in their needs, and caring for their children and their sick. Night after night, when she was supposed to be in her own room, she had stolen away to watch by the bedside of some invalid, relieving for a few hours, the tired watchers who had been with them all day. It was from her lips that many an afflicted one received sweet words of consolation when death or sorrow entered their homes, and they always accepted them with gratitude, knowing that they came from a sympathizing and contrite heart. How eagerly did these poor people look for her visits which seemed to bring a ray of sunshine into their homes, and how they blessed her whenever they saw her. To them she seemed more like one of themselves than so far superior to them in education, wealth, and all worldly goods. What time she spent at home was occupied mostly in sewing for the children, or thinking of some plan to alleviate the cares of their parents. Such, to-day, was the queenly

Inez who, three years before, had moved in society's gayest circles, finding great enjoyment in it.

In vain had Lord and Lady Ashleigh tried to persuade their daughter to re-enter society after the first few months of mourning for Walter Tracy was over, and within the past two years many brilliant social gatherings had taken place at their home, but she took no interest in them, only being present when she was obliged to and seldom attending any to which she was invited. On one occasion during a grand ball given at the mansion in honor of a wealthy Irish earl who was visiting in the neighborhood she was missed from the company. It was only after a dilligent search of the mansion that it occurred to one of the servants that an old lady was sick in a cottage near by and it was at her bedside that she found her. The woman believing that she was dying had sent a messenger for her and she had gone, only stopping to throw a shawl on over her party dress.

Seeing that they failed here, her parents had proposed traveling on the continent and spending several months in Paris, but it was to no avail. She did not care to travel and she despised the very name of Paris with all of its giddy pleasures and its throngs of gay people. She always an-

swered them that she was far happier living as she was. "I have many true friends," she would say, "although they are poor, but in society I should be obliged to mingle with the false as well as the true, and besides I can never find any pleasure in them."

Inez had always been her parents greatest pride as well as the idol of strangers while she mingled with the world, and it grieved them sorely to see their only and beautiful daughter turn her back on her adorers and live, as it were, unknown to the world, while, on the other hand, that busy throng, as they moved on, sometimes thought of her and wished to have her once more among them. Her parents had hoped that when the grief caused by her first lover's death was over, she would marry some rich lord and become a greater lady than even the daughter of Lord Ashleigh. Her beauty, her winning manner, her wealth and family connections, could not fail to win for her such a husband as they desired her to have ; but as time went by they saw too plainly that she had no such thoughts and that in all probability she intended that no one should ever fill Walter Tracy's place. They would sometimes console themselves by saying that she was still young and in a few years might outgrow her whims, as they called her mode of life.

Sir Edward had heard of how Inez was living before he saw her and he had thought her a very foolish person to thus hide herself away from her friends like a "cloistered nun," as he expressed it. He had known her from childhood and had always taken great interest in her. He was now determined to persuade her to give up her foolishness and become his happy bride. It seemed easy for him who believed her to be only a weak-minded girl. At first when he saw her her sweet sad face and altered appearance had wholly disarmed him. But what did he care, for he was one of those kind who, once his mind was set upon an object, would accomplish it whatever the cost might be.

How proud he was in the anticipation of bringing to his mother's beautiful London home not far from the Tracy mansion, the fair bride who three years before had been expected in that vicinity by many friends of his own as well as the Tracy family, for both families moved in the same circle. They had been greatly disappointed in not having her come then, and he was certain she would receive a warm welcome among them now. He would have her re-open the Tracy mansion which he knew belonged to her and which had been left just as it had been prepared for her first coming to

it. How proud he would be to see her reign as mistress of that beautiful domain and queen of her own household. He knew that his position and title were in his favor as far as the opinion of Inez's parents went and he also knew himself to be one of Lord Ashleigh's most esteemed and trusted friends. To him he would make first appeal and try to win Inez's affections through her parents, not right away but some time in the near future, perhaps when he returned to make his promised visit if a favorable opportunity presented itself.

Lord and Lady Ashleigh, in their affection for their daughter, had for the past few months allowed her to have her own way, saying nothing about it, although it grieved them very much to be obliged to do so, and would have continued to let her follow her own inclinations, trusting that she would soon grow tired of her melancholy life, had not the evil disturber come when he did. During his first visit Sir Edward said nothing of the matter but watched Inez, carefully noting every action and trying to learn what he could of her from the villagers but, still, trying to appear to pay little or no attention to her. On the afternoon of the second day he left Torrence, saying that he regretted having to shorten so pleasant a visit but would return some time in the spring.

There had been a time when in spite of her feeling of secret dislike for this man, Inez had welcomed him as a friend of her parents and for their sake had been glad to see him, but now something made her feel that he was her secret enemy, so she felt relieved when he was gone and almost dreaded the time when he should return for his promised visit. When he had taken her hand with a grasp of friendship as he bade her good-bye, although outwardly unmoved, she shrank from those fingers as she would from a deadly serpent coiling around her hand. "Oh uncharitable feeling," she thought a few minutes after he was gone, "how can I who pretend to be a Christian have such a hatred for one of my father's friends of whom I know naught but good? May God forgive me for this unmerited hatred and help me to conquer it before he returns that I may at least give him such a welcome as my father would expect me to give." With a repeated act of contrition she tried to vanish him from her mind.

Trying to forget Sir Edward, it occurred to her that during the past two days she had entirely neglected to visit a little girl who was slowly dying of consumption in a cottage some distance from her home. The little invalid who was

scarcely eleven years old was the only child of a very pious mother, and a father who had once been a model Christian but who of late although he had fallen into no bad habits and was still very kind to his wife and child; had grown very careless in his religious duties, seldom attending Mass excepting when he did so to please them and neglecting the sacraments altogether. From her birth the child had been idolized by her parents and all of their hopes had been centered upon her. Now as they saw her slowly drifting away they were nearly broken-hearted for all that they cherished would be lost when she was gone, but Inez had been their most faithful friend and consoler during the several weeks of their darling's illness. To the little girl and her mother her coming had always brought a bright ray of sunshine while the grief-stricken father seemed at times to be pained by her kindness. As his wife watched him she would sometimes whisper to Inez, who was her confidant in all her sorrows that she feared the death of their little girl might cause him to lose his mind, as he had been very melancholy since her health had commenced to fail.

“How is my little Bessie this evening?” Inez asked as she entered the room where the little sufferer lie.

Tears filled the mother's eyes as she whispered to Inez that her little girl had failed so rapidly during the previous day that she had been prepared for death that morning and she feared she would not live through the night. "I would have come earlier," said Inez, "but Sir Edward Sarsdale, an old friend of father's has been visiting us and I did not find an opportunity." A deep frown darkened the face of the child's father and he muttered something to himself but both the mother and Inez were too much absorbed in little Bessie to notice it.

Inez had intended to remain but a few minutes but when she saw how Bessie had failed she insisted upon spending the night with her in spite of the father's protestation to the contrary. He said that there was probably no immediate danger as she had had several such sinking spells lately and it would be too much for her to sit up all night. Toward midnight Bessie grew decidedly worse and it was feared that she was dying. On one side of the bed stood the weeping mother and Inez watching for the last, and at the foot stood the father with folded arms and his eyes fixed upon the dying child. On his face was a careworn look that told he was no stranger to suffering.

"Please don't cry so mamma," said Bessie,

noticing the tears in her mother's eyes, "for I am so happy and have been so ever since I received my first Holy Communion this morning. I can almost see the angels in Heaven now and will soon be with them."

"When you get to Heaven, darling," said the man at the foot of the bed, "I hope you will not forget your father." It was the first time in many months that he had seemed to think of Heaven, or care for any one's prayers. Bessie smiled and said, "I am so glad, papa, that you want me to remember you in Heaven. I will think of you there, and pray for you as I have often prayed for you here. And now, papa," her voice grew weaker, "will you promise me that you'll go to confession this week, receive the sacraments often, and try to be better than you have been? Please do, papa"

The father gazed at her pleading for a few minutes; then answered in a strange voice that seemed not like his own. "Yes, Bessie, with the help of God's grace I will."

"May God bless our child," said the mother in a tone mingled with joy and sorrow, "she has been such a comfort to us; even now, her presence is a blessing in our home, and oh! how can I part with her?"

“I know it is hard,” said Inez; “but it is God’s will, and may be for the best. If you pray to Him he will give you strength to bear it.”

The father said nothing, but stood like a marble statue gazing fixedly at the face of his child, until about half-past two, when, without a murmur or a groan, she gave herself up to the angel of death; who had been hovering over her bed, and passed away as quietly as if she had fallen into a peaceful slumber. Her father’s face was the last one she saw, and as she was dying he was seen to close his eyes for a minute as if to escape from her searching glance, which even in death seemed to read his innermost thoughts. When she was gone he sank helplessly into a chair and burst into a passionate flood of tears, such as only a strong man can shed. It was in vain that Inez tried to comfort him, but her efforts seemed only to increase his grief.

“I know you have suffered, Inez,” he said, in a tone of bitterness, “and can truly sympathize with the afflicted, but I have suffered more than you and cannot accept your sympathy—cannot accept it because I know that I am unworthy of such kindness from you. Give what you have to my poor wife. She is far more worthy than I.”

At the mother’s request Inez called in one of

the neighbors to help lay out the child and she remained until morning when, after rendering all the assistance possible, she returned home, to find her parents not a little surprised to learn that she had been away all night.

“ You shouldn’t have done it, Inez,” said her mother, when she told her where she had spent the night, “ for you are not strong enough to lose your night’s rest. ”

Inez had been reproved thus before and she now answered as she had then : “ Mother, it is no more injurious to my health to spend the night in a work of charity than to spend it in a heated ball-room as I have so often done. ”

Not content with what she had already done for the parents of little Bessie, Inez felt that her work was not finished until after the child was laid in her grave. It was she that had closed her lids in death, it was she that now bought and made the little white burial robe, and it was she that prepared the corpse for the coffin and laid it in as tenderly as her own mother could have done, then covered the coffin lid with white flowers from her own nursery. After the funeral was over she returned home with the parents to offer a few more words of consolation, for she was one of those few who seem to realize, when there is a death in any

household excepting their own, that the few lonely hours after the funeral are often the saddest ones for mourners. It is then that those who came to comfort them before or, perhaps, visited them in their deep affliction through idle curiosity, think no more of them now that their dear ones are hidden from their sight.

This instance was only one of the many, and by no means one of the greatest acts of charity performed by our brave young heroine. They were looked upon by the poor, and those whom she called her true friends, as the noblest sacrifices, while, on the other hand, those who had once known her in the social world and doted on her beauty, wealth and accomplishments looked upon them as the greatest acts of foolishness. Let the wordly think what it may, such noble deeds as hers cannot go unrewarded, for in the record above all of her good works are kept by one who sees and knows the sincerity of her heart, and by the same hand that kept the record of the good done his comrades by Walter Tracy in a land far away from where he now sleeps.

CHAPTER III.

As the weeks went by and the time for Sir Edward Sarsdale's visit to Torrence drew near the feeling that Inez had when she bade him good-bye returned and she dreaded his coming as she would the entrance of an enemy into her peaceful home. She had conquered her hatred toward him, but it now again rose within her and she almost felt that she could not meet him but would like to flee from home before he came if it were possible. There were duties at home that needed her attention and to perform them she must stay and meet him. In a moment it came to her again that she knew no evil of him and that it was wrong to thus give way to her own foolish scruples. It was now the middle of April, and that evening as she sat in the parlor with her parents a letter was brought in for her father. It was from Sir Edward, and said that he would be at the mansion on the first day of May. On hearing the letter read Inez's first impulse was to tell her parents how unwelcome he would be to her and beg her father to write and tell him that it would not be convenient for them to entertain him then,

but remembering that she had no reason to dislike him, she would offer no objections to his coming.

When he had finished reading the letter, Lord Ashleigh turned to his wife and daughter and said, "I suppose Sir Edward will be welcome to you both."

"Certainly," said Lady Ashleigh, "I shall be pleased to see our old friend at any time."

"And you, Inez?" asked her father.

"Anyone who is welcome to mother and you are always welcome to me," she said, with a smile that hid the great effort her words cost her.

Among other duties that Inez had taken upon herself was to prepare a large class of children for their first Holy Communion, which they were to receive on the feast of Corpus Christi. The class was to meet on the first day of May and so interested was Inez in them that she almost forgot that on that afternoon Sir Edward was expected. At three o'clock the children were assembled in the church to receive a few words of instruction from the priest before reciting their catechism. The instructions were over and Inez had commenced to hear the class recite when the church door opened and Sir Edward entered. She looked up, thinking it might be one of the children, but when she saw who the visitor was she turned

again to her class and took no more notice of him. He had probably just arrived and had stopped to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, but this surprised her a little as she had always known him to be very indifferent to religious matters.

He remained until the class was dismissed then as Inez was about to leave the church he stepped up to her and offered his hand saying that he was very happy to have been so fortunate as to meet her before reaching her home and at the same time apologizing for having intruded upon her. He said that he thought that there was no one in the church when he entered but when he found her there with her class he could not help admiring the interest she took in her work and waited to accompany her home. As soon as they reached the mansion Inez excused herself and went to her own room leaving her guest with her father who they found watching for them from the front porch as they came up the walk leading to the house.

Inez had resolved that although she would treat Sir Edward with every respect that courtesy and hospitality demanded during his visit she would shun him as much as possible. The work she had taken upon herself, she did now with even greater interest than before trying to be away from home as much as she could, and when she was at home

she applied so closely to work done in her own room as to give her but little leisure time for the entertainment of her father's guest. She seldom met him excepting when the family was present and when obliged to be in his company, she was very reserved, conversing very little but still endeavoring to be courteous. Sir Edward on the other hand sought every opportunity to be in her company. He offered to accompany her on her errands of charity but she politely thanked him saying she preferred going alone or in company of one of the servants as she had been in the habit of doing. He was a daily attendant at Mass not because it was a habit (for he cared very little for the church) but because he was sure of meeting her there.

One evening about a week after Sir Edward's arrival he was in the parlor alone with Lord Ashleigh. They had been talking of various topics but at last, as was often the case when the lord was talking with an intimate friend the conversation drifted upon what always interested him most, namely, Inez. Sir Edward had been watching for such an opportunity as this and now he would not let it pass without making one effort to gain his object. "I hope you will not be offended," he said, "if as a friend I tell you candidly what I think of your daughter."

“Certainly not,” said Lord Ashleigh, “I am never offended to hear what my friends think of my daughter, especially if it is anything concerning her welfare and I am certain you could think of nothing else.”

“Well,” said Sir Edward, “as one who is interested only in her welfare on account of the friendship I bear for your family, I would say that I consider her very foolish to be pining away and breaking her heart over one who has been dead so long, over three years now, when she might make such a brilliant member of society as you know she bade fair to do before his death. I do not mean disrespect to the name of Walter Tracy for but few lamented his tragic death more than I. On that memorable Christmas I believe that that there was not a brighter happier girl in all England than she—and now—on my return I could hardly believe that the sad faced girl I saw was the same bright butterfly that flitted through the hall that evening. I who have been away so long can see the change plainer than you who have been accustomed to seeing her every day and I find her only a mere shadow of her former self.”

“I fear she will never be herself again,” said her father sadly, “my bright and happy Inez died that night, leaving in her place the broken hearted

girl who will ever remain the same as long as she is with us."

A smile unnoticed by Lord Ashleigh played upon the young man's countenance as he said, "as long as she continues leading the life of a nun as she is now doing, she can never be herself, such a life is unnatural for her and cannot bring her any happiness."

"But what can I do," asked Lord Ashleigh, "when she will not change her ways which you may be sure cause both her mother and I untold sorrow."

"Persuade her to give up that work which is so far beneath her and re-enter society and you will soon find a great change in her," said Sir Edward.

"We have tried that several times," answered her father, "we have had a number of social gatherings at our home on her account but it was of no use for she took no interest in them and has even left when her company was most wanted and gone to some miserable cottage. She says she is far happier as she is, working for the welfare of others, than she would be to return to the social world."

"And you believe her?" asked Sir Edward.
"How can a young lady of her age and position

be happier spending her time in the miserable homes of those uneducated peasants than in company of refined people of her own rank who are the only fit associates for her?"

"My daughter is the very embodiment of truth," said the father, "and has never deceived her mother or me; so I know she would not say she was happy, if she were not."

"That may be true," said the young man, "but my idea is that it is herself she is deceiving in making herself believe that she is really happy when in reality she is very miserable."

"Impossible," said Lord Ashleigh, "how can that be?"

"You know Inez was very young when she left society and she saw so little of it that she learned nothing of its enjoyments, then entering upon this work at a time when she cared for nothing else soon grew accustomed to it and now does not wish to give it up. Besides being so far beneath her it gives her more time to brood over her own sorrow which should have been forgotten long ago."

Lord Ashleigh was silent for a few minutes as if pondering upon the words just spoken by his young friend. It was something that had never before entered his mind and could it be possible that it was true? Could his darling daughter be

deceiving herself? If such were the case he would do all in his power to change her, but the next question was what was he to do for he had tried everything he could think of but to no purpose.

“I think a few months travel on the continent would do Inez as much good as anything,” suggested Sir Edward, “or you might take her to Paris and introduce her into society there. I have many friends among the *elite* of that city who would only be too happy to make her acquaintance. You see the chief object is to get her away from the scene of that tragedy and the grave of the victim and have her make new friends who know nothing of her sorrow and cannot remind her of it.”

“I have mentioned what you suggest to Inez,” said Lord Ashleigh, “but she does not care to travel and seems to have a great aversion to the city of Paris.”

“You should insist upon it,” was the reply, “I am certain that you would have very little difficulty in persuading her to comply with your wishes if you did, for from what I have seen of her, I believe as much as she likes to have her own way, she is still one of those obedient girls who would not refuse anything that she saw her parents hearts were set upon. I expect to return to

the continent in about four or five weeks and would be pleased to go in your company if you think that yourself and family can be ready by that time."

"A brilliant suggestion," said Lord Ashleigh, "for which I thank you very much, but I think we can hardly be able to go so soon as my son will not be home from Oxford until about three or four weeks later and I do not wish to leave home until he can accompany us."

"You can let him know where we will be when school closes and he can join us there," said Sir Edward.

"I will talk the matter over with Lady Ashleigh," said the lord, "and in a day or two will try to decide what to do. If this plan succeeds in again making my daughter the happy girl that she was three years and a half ago, I can never thank you enough for the interest you have taken in her. I shall then indeed believe that it was a happy day for me and my family when you came to my home."

"If you do as I suggested I am certain that you will meet with success," said Sir Edward, "but I think it best not to let Inez know anything of your plans until the arrangements for the journey have all been made."

The two men shook hands as they bade each other good night and went to their own rooms, one thinking of the great happiness of restoring his daughter to the happy girl she had been and to the society where her absence had been so greatly lamented; the other rejoicing over the one point gained in his favor from the "old man" as he laughingly called Lord Ashleigh to himself. Could Inez have seen Sir Edward that night as he sat in his room rejoicing over the exploit of the evening, with a wicked smile on his face, she might not have thought that her suspicions of him were ungrounded. "Make Inez as light-hearted as she was before that night," he muttered half aloud, "it will be impossible, for her's is too sensitive a nature ever to forget that scene, but what do I care if I can win her for my beautiful bride and become master of the grand old Tracy mansion?"

The next day Lord Ashleigh spoke to his wife of the proposed journey, telling her all that Sir Edward had said, and laying the argument before her in such a forcible manner that she was soon made to believe as her husband did. As the one hope of the mother's as well as of the father's life since that fatal night when Walter Tracy was murdered was to restore Inez to what she had been be-

fore, she now joined her husband in thanking Sir Edward for the kind interest he took in their daughter. That there was any selfish motive behind it never once entered their mind.

It was decided that they should go to Paris with Sir Edward, and remain there a few weeks until Inez had made the acquaintance of some of his friends, and her brother had joined them. The summer was to be spent traveling, in the fall they would return to Paris and remain there all winter.

Preparations were commenced at once, but everything was done so cautiously that Inez suspected nothing until the fourth of June, when her mother told her that they were to leave home on the morning of the eighth. Sir Edward had been gone two weeks, and nothing was said of meeting him.

Inez could scarcely believe her ears, for she knew that her parents were not over fond of being away from home even for a few days, and thought they had entirely abandoned the idea; they had had some traveling with her some time before, so that now the fact that they were going away to remain nearly a year quite surprised her. She did not wish to leave home, and to add to her disappointment in going, the ninth of the month was the feast of Corpus Christi, the day on which the chil-

dren were to receive their first Communion. She had worked with untiring zeal to prepare them for that great event, and had looked forward to it with almost as much joy as they, thinking of the time, when as an innocent child, she herself had approached the holy table for the first time. With her own hands she had made two or three of the white dresses for little girls whose mothers had no time to make them, and was busy sewing on another when her mother came to her with the unwelcome news. If she could remain at home two days longer to share her little friends' happiness with them she would be more content to go; but the arrangements for the trip had already been made, passage engaged, and they were to sail early on the morning of the ninth, so there could be no delay.

Leaving her mother she hastened to her own room, and would have given vent to her feelings by a passionate burst of tears; but she had no time for this, as it was nearly three o'clock, time for her to be with the children in the church, and she must try to appear cheerful before them. Tears stood in her eyes as she stood by the window watching the little groups assembling in front of the chapel, and looking now and then toward her home, as if expecting to see her coming. She could not meet them there for she feared that their

welcome would entirely unnerve her, so she waited until the clock in the steeple had struck three and the children had all gone in the chapel; then putting on her hat she went over.

She kept a smiling face during the instructions, and intended to tell the children as they were leaving the church that she was going away, but she could not bear the thoughts of the disappointment it would cause them, so she did not leave the church with them as usual, but remained until they were all gone, then went out through the vestry door to escape them. She intended telling them in the morning, but no need of it then, for one of the servants at the mansion, who had accidentally heard Lady Ashleigh talking of it had told it the evening before, and nearly every one in Torrence knew that they were going away.

On Monday morning she spent nearly an hour with the children before they went on their retreat, and several times during that day and the next, she stole into the chapel for a few minutes while they were there. Wednesday morning she was one of the first in the chapel to attend Mass and also to receive Communion before starting on her journey. When Mass was over she bade each one good-bye at the door, telling them not to forget to say a prayer for her on the morrow and al-

ways to try to keep as pure as they were now. The parting was even harder than she had anticipated, for the children wept and begged her to remain with them just until after to-morrow, and she was obliged to tear herself away from some of the little girls who clung to her as if they would force her to remain.

Little over an hour later, in company with her parents, Inez was on her way to London, where another disappointment accompanying her leaving home was awaiting her. She did not know that Sir Edward was to accompany them, and had consoled herself by thinking that she would enjoy the company of her parents and brother alone, until he met them on their arrival in the city. Inez's heart sank within her when she learned that he was going, and she longed to be home again, or almost anywhere where she might escape him. He, as usual, was very gracious, and seemed overjoyed to see his friends. "I am so glad you are going to visit the continent," he said to her, "for I am certain that it will do you a great deal of good. I can already see that you are looking better." This remark was intended more for Lord Ashleigh than for his daughter to whom it was addressed. It pleased him, but she listened to it in silent contempt.

The party sailed from Liverpool before day-break on the feast of Corpus Christi, and at half-past eight they were quite a distance out in the English Channel. Inez sat alone near the edge of the deck, thinking of home and watching the land as it receded farther and farther away until at last it was invisible, then when only the green waters were in sight another picture arose before her mental vision ; it was the picture of about twenty little girls in spotless white, wearing long veils and wreaths of white flowers, and as many more boys in black, as they entered the dear little chapel so many miles away. She saw the white-robed priest on the altar and could almost hear the sweet strains of the “ Kyrie Eleison ” and the deep rich tones of the organ over which her own fingers had so often wandered during divine services, mingled with the waters through which the vessel ploughed. She thought of the children who, as after the “ Domine non sun dignus ” had been pronounced, approached the holy table for the first time to receive their Blessed Redeemer into their innocent souls. “ May God bless and preserve those dear little ones,” she half whispered to herself just as a hand was laid on her arm. Raising her eyes she saw Sir Edward standing beside her.

“ Please pardon me, Inez, for intruding upon

you," he said, "but you looked so lonely sitting here alone that I wished to ask you to join a crowd of us on the other side of the boat." Inez thanked him for his thoughtfulness and went with him to the other side, although she preferred remaining undisturbed where she was.

The weather during the voyage was delightful, just what anyone who is fond of the water would have enjoyed, but Inez thought not of the weather, for her heart was in her home and she was wondering how long it would be before she would be there again.

Arriving in Paris, they took a suit of rooms in one of the most fashionable hotels in the city and for the next three weeks they made their headquarters there, while the greater part of the time was spent in making acquaintances, calling, receiving calls and visiting the different places of interest. The first week in July Lord Ashleigh's son joined them and two days later found the party on their way to Norway and Sweden, where they remained until the last of the month, when they retraced their steps toward the countries of Southern Europe.

It was the middle of September when they arrived in the grand and ancient city of Rome. Inez had always had a great desire to visit this

city with its many beautiful churches and ancient monuments of Christianity, and the thought that she would see it before returning home made her journey through the other countries more pleasant than it would otherwise have been. With her parents and Sir Edward she visited St. Peter's and received the blessing of the Supreme Pontiff and head of the church.

Everywhere in that holy city new and sublime granduers presented themselves, and she would have been truly happy there had it not been for one thing,—Sir Edward seemed to haunt her like a dark shadow wherever she went and it was in vain that she strove to shun him. He knew the city of Rome as well as though he had always lived there, and insisted upon going with her whenever she went out.

Nowhere had she been more affected than in the Colosseum, for she felt that she could almost see the countless number of holy men and women—yes, and even mere children, who had hallowed every inch of that sacred ground by bloodshed in defense of the faith which she herself professed. Brightest among these pictures in her mind was the form of a beautiful golden-haired girl of scarcely thirteen, who stood bravely before the vast crowd of hard-hearted heathen spectators and offered herself to be

tortured rather than deny her faith by sacrificing to their false gods. She had consented to suffer a most cruel death sooner than break her vow of virginity and marry one who had promised her freedom, long life and happiness. She would not dishonor her heavenly spouse by giving to another the heart she had consecrated to Him. All that our heroine had read of the terrible tortures of this holy child came back to her mind. She saw the heavy iron fetters as they fell from the arms too small to hold them and heard the prefect, after finding that her faith could not be shaken, command her to be beheaded. Cheerfully she had received the stroke of the executioner's ax which had severed her head from her body and sent her pure soul to its God. This was the glorious St. Agnes, Inez's patron saint, whose name she bore (Inez is the Spanish for Agnes) and for whom she had always felt the greatest devotion.

The beautiful church of St. Agnes was but a short distance from where our friends were stopping in Rome; and when Inez learned the way to it she attended Mass there every morning, but dearer to her was the church just outside the walls of Rome, where rests the relics of this saint.

“ The tomb of Agnes graces Rome,
A maiden brave, a martyr great,
Resting in sight of bastioned gate,

From harm the virgin shields her home ;
Nor to the stranger help denies,
If sought with pure and faithful sighs."

—PRUDENTIUS.

The party had been in Rome about a week when they visited this church, and it was while there that Inez was seized with a desire to follow her little patron's example by receiving the veil of virginity if she could not like her suffer martyrdom for her faith. The one to whom she had once given her heart had been taken from her and she now felt that it was because God wanted her himself. How she longed now to seek admission to one of the convents she had visited in the city and there hide herself away from all of the trials and temptations of this world, spending the remainder of her life in the service of God and doing good to the poor. There at least, as well as being where she felt in her heart was the only true home for her, she would be free from her enemy, Sir Edward, for once those sacred doors had been closed behind her she would never be troubled by him or see his face again. Her time had not yet come, for the sorrows of the world were to make a still deeper impression upon her heart before she bade it adieu. Her companions arose to leave the church and, breathing a silent prayer that her vocation might soon be fulfilled, she cast a lingering glance at the altar and followed them.

That afternoon she sat alone in the parlor of the hotel reading the "Life of St. Agnes," which had been given to her when a child and which she always kept with her. She had read it many times before, but now being so near the scenes of the martyr's triumph it was filled with new interest for her. She laid it down for a few minutes and was so deeply absorbed in her own peaceful thoughts that she did not hear the door as it softly opened nor the sound of footsteps in the room, until her name was spoken. Looking up she saw Sir Edward standing before her with a pleasant smile on his face,

"Inez," he said, "I have for a long time been watching for an opportunity to speak to you alone, and now that it has presented itself I hope you will not deny me the favor, as it is on a very important matter."

Inez did not answer or even raise her eyes to the speaker, but would have flown from his presence and hid herself in her room had it been possible. "Inez," he continued in a low tone, stepping nearer to her, "I have loved you for a long time—have even worshipped you from the time I first saw you when you were but a child." She cast a look of scorn upon him, and being unable to speak, motioned him from her. He paid no heed

to this but went on. "Nothing made me so happy as to see you happy, and when after three years' absence from home I returned to England last winter to find you so altered it almost broke my heart. I longed to see you bright and cheerful as you had once been and was rejoiced when your father told me of his intention to take you for a while away from the scenes where you were so unhappy.

"When I left England with your parents I intended to remain in France until their return but, thinking that the journey might be more pleasant for you to have some one with you who was well acquainted with the countries you visited, I decided to accompany you. Not only that, Inez, but your presence has made the tour a most delightful one to your humble servant, myself. Now, dearest, in return for my affection can you not love me a little, can you not promise to become my happy bride?"

"She did not raise her eyes from the floor, but said in a low, firm tone, "Sir Edward," it is useless for you to talk thus to me, for I shall never marry. Please leave me."

"Nonsense, Inez," he said, "you do not mean that, you certainly do not intend to spend your whole life mourning over one who has already

been dead nearly four years. You cannot afford to waste such a bright existence as yours in such a foolish manner."

"Please do not mention the dead to me thus," said Inez, "and as for meaning what I say, I do mean it and am happy as I am. I wish to hear no more from you."

"Happy, Inez," he said, you deceive yourself, but if you will—"Sir Edward," she said, interrupting him, I have heard enough from you and you will confer a great favor upon me by leaving me to myself." As he made no motion to go but commenced speaking again, Inez arose and advanced toward the door. He stepped in front of her, and putting his hand on the knob to hold the door shut, said, "please stay, Inez, and hear what I have to say to you."

She turned to him and said, "Sir Edward, if you do not let me pass I shall cry for help." He stepped back and cast a fearful glance after her as she passed through the door and went upstairs to her own room. "Heartless woman," he muttered to himself, "but I shall conquer in spite of all her stubbornness and she shall yet be mine."

Inez declined to go down to supper that night on the plea that she was not feeling well, but her true reason was that she did not wish to meet Sir

Edward. During the remainder of their stay in Rome she shunned him more than before and took precautions never to go out alone when she thought that there was any possibility of meeting him.

The middle of October they bade farewell to the holy city of martyrs and returned to the gay fashionable city of Paris. Here Inez soon became a belle in some of the most fashionable circles of the city which she had entered very unwillingly. Balls, receptions and operas occupied the greater part of her time for Sir Edward was well known in some of the most select circles and a friend of his could not find other than a hearty welcome especially as she was the daughter of an English lord. Inez's sweet sad face always won for her friends wherever she went but here she was almost an idol. Her manner which was almost cold on account of her dislike for the fashionable world was mistaken by many for a modest dignity and it won for her scores of friends instead of driving them from her. Others there were who being jealous of her tried to make their friends believe that she was void of all feeling for any one and cared for nothing but to draw admiration upon herself, then treat her admirers with contempt. Happily those who held this opinion were very

few and they belonged to a class not worth her notice. Her parents heard only the complimentary remarks about her and they were overjoyed to see how many admirers she had. Their greatest thought seemed to be of her dress which was the most beautiful, and they joined their friend Sir Edward in trying to draw admiration upon her. "How can we ever thank our friend enough for all of the kind interest he takes in our daughter?" the lord would sometimes say to his wife after returning from some ball where Inez had appeared to enjoy herself, "for I think that he was right in saying Paris would do her good. I already believe that she has forgotten her sorrow and is happy as of old." They were deceived here for behind that smiling face was an aching heart which even in the midst of the dance which Inez appeared to enjoy so much longed to be alone and far from those giddy pleasures.

Swiftly the weeks passed for those who enjoyed the amusements of society life, but slowly, oh so slowly for Inez and it was now the latter part of January. The society people in Paris were holding high carnival for only a few weeks more and the season would be over. Inez's admirers had increased and many looked upon her company as a privilege to be proud of but none more so than

a young man who had come to Paris a few days after her arrival. He was a German count and an only child of very wealthy parents who had left him an orphan a few years before. Having finished his education the spring before he had come to Paris to spend the winter. His wealth and high position were well known by those in the circle in which he moved and many sought his company on that account, but he spurned with contempt those people and made the friendship only of those on whom he felt that he could rely. Lord Ashleigh was among those few and the young count spent many pleasant hours in his rooms.

Inez was often present when he came and did all that she could to make his visits pleasant for him because she thought that he was a good and noble man and one who would always be a true friend, but she did not dream that she was encouraging his affections until her mother told her that he had asked her hand in marriage and had been accepted by both her and her husband. She told Inez that she could not find any one more worthy of her.

Inez felt a sickening sensation come over her when she heard this and she burst into a passionate flood of tears. When she was able to speak

she said, "Oh, mother how could you promise me to him when I can never marry?"

"Inez," said her mother, "when you can do so well you should not refuse for your happiness depends upon it. I have reasons to think that you have some affections for him otherwise you would not have encouraged his attentions as you have."

"Encouraged him," said Inez, "I have only treated him as a friend, and as such I look upon him, no more."

"Then you intend to decline his offer after both your father and I have accepted him?"

"Yes, mother," said Inez, "and I am very sorry if he thinks that I have been trying to encourage his affections when I had no such thoughts."

Lady Ashleigh spent nearly an hour trying to persuade Inez to accept the young count but she remained steadfast telling her mother that she would never marry and begging her to tell him so when he came that afternoon for her answer. "I will tell him no such thing," said her mother, "for I do not intend that you shall reject him in this way. You must see him yourself when he comes."

"Oh, mother," said Inez, "please spare me the pain of meeting him whom I have wronged by unconsciously encouraging his attentions."

“You must meet him when he comes,” said her mother, “I am certain he will insist upon seeing you so prepare yourself to see him.”

Lady Ashleigh went out and left Inez alone in dismay. She gave vent to her feelings for a few minutes by a bitter burst of tears then throwing herself upon her knees she prayed for forgiveness for the wrong she had done in causing the count to believe that she cared for him when she did not and for strength to give him the answer which her mother had refused to give. She felt relieved now but she still felt that she could not meet him. After walking across the room several times she sat down by the table and drawing out a sheet of paper wrote what she had desired her mother to say for her. The note was very short and in closing she said that she esteemed him as a friend but he could never be any more to her. She asked to be excused from meeting him. Having finished the note she carefully re-read it several times and laid it away until afternoon when her mother came to her room to tell her that he had come.

“Please give him this, mother,” she said handing her the note, “and ask him to excuse me.”

“That will not do, Inez,” said her mother, laying it on the table, “you must come down and see him yourself.”

Inez refused to go, so her mother very reluctantly took the note and left the room. In a few minutes she returned, saying that the guest was gone, but had left no word for her. The next day she received a letter from him telling her that he expected to leave Paris that day and return to his home, and that he would always remember her as a friend, and would often think of the pleasant hours he had spent in her company as being among the happiest he had ever known.

Inez did not regret having rejected the count and she felt relieved when she received his note, and knew that he would trouble her no more; but still there was a sadness in the tone of that short missive which made her feel that through her own fault she had lost a true friend, and she half wished that she might see him once more before he left the city; not to take back anything she had written, but to ask his forgiveness for anything that she might have done to hurt his feelings and to bid him good-bye, as she would a friend. She was sitting by the window, and as she looked out he passed. She saw him look toward her window, but hid herself behind the heavy lace curtain, and unobserved by him, watched him until he was out of sight. This was her last farewell.

Lord and Lady Ashleigh were both very angry with their daughter for refusing to marry the count. It was not long ere the tidings of this reached the ear of Sir Edward, and he offered words of sympathy to her parents by telling them that he hoped she would soon think better of her foolish choice, and he believed that the count would not give her up so easily as they thought, while in his own heart he resolved that Inez should never again meet the wealthy foreigner who had given him so much cause to be jealous. He had watched every attention paid Inez by him, wishing that he was out of his way, and now that he was gone he felt that the way was once more clear for him, and he would soon regain the undivided esteem of Lord Ashleigh, which he had possessed before the coming of the stranger.

Inez now longed more than ever to be in her own peaceful home, but that pleasure was not granted until the latter part of May, when, after nearly a year's absence, our friends arrived at Torrence.

Sir Edward, having gained the consent of Inez's parents to marry her if the count was not heard from again, had been most persevering in his attentions to her while in Paris, and had laid his plea before her again, only to be met with the

same refusal he had received in Rome. Determined not to give her up so easily, he paid a long visit to Torrence the following autumn, but she shunned him more than before.

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTMAS eve had come again, and it was now five years since Walter Tracy had been laid away in the family burial lot. No guests thronged the mansion to-night for Christmas eve had on that memorable night been turned from a night of joy and revelry to one of silence and loneliness. Although other rooms in the mansion had oft since been thronged with gay people, never had the great hall been opened to admit guests. It was dreary and dark there on Christmas eve, excepting when partially lit by the rays of the moon, which gave the room a more ghastly appearance than ever, and revealed the dark blood stains on the floor where Walter had fell. No yule log burned on the cold hearth, and only a few withered branches of holly and evergreen hung among the dust covered pictures on the wall.

The inmates of the mansion seemed to shun the hall now, and among the servants a superstition had already sprung up that it was haunted during the holidays; on these nights strange sounds were said to proceed from it. 'Twas even said that at midnight on Christmas eve a light had been seen

in the window through which the fatal shot had been fired. This superstition, which was probably founded on imagination, did not extend to any other members of the family, although tidings of it were sometimes whispered by outsiders.

It was as cold and almost as stormy to-night as it had been five years ago to-night. Inez stood by the window of her room gazing out on the drifts, and wondering if there was any one in the village to-night who needed help. She had visited several of the cottages during the past two days and sent servants to some of the others, so that she believed that no one had been overlooked, and felt that her work for to-day was done. The clock struck eight. Inez put on her hat and wrap, and crossed the street to the chapel, intending to go to confession. She was kneeling at the altar railing saying her prayers when one of the priests was called from his confessional. He soon returned and asked her to step into the vestry, as he wished to speak to her. She followed him and learned that he had just been sent for to go on a sick call about five miles in the country. "I am sorry to ask you to accompany me," he said, "but the man cannot live more than a few hours, and seems very anxious to see you. Will you go, or do you think that it is too stormy for you to go so

far at such a late hour?"

"I will go, father," she answered; "no night is too stormy or too cold for me to go out when I can be of any service to the poor or the sick."

"May God bless you for your charity, my child," said the priest, and he might have added, "May God help you to bear what you have to hear to-night," but he only breathed a silent pray for her in his heart. "The sleigh will be ready in a few minutes," he said, "and to save the time and trouble of going home for warmer wraps than what you have on, my housekeeper will lend you some of her's."

The daughter of Lord Ashleigh smiled at the thought of the queer figure she cut in the hood and the heavy coarse woolen shawl the kind old woman wrapped around her, saying as she did so, "It seems too cold for my dear girl to go out," but Inez cared not for she was going on an errand of mercy. After going what seemed more than twice five miles through drifts some of which it seemed almost impossible to pass, they saw in the distance a faint light, which grew brighter as they neared it, until they could see the window of a miserable hut, which seemed unfit for human habitation.

"There is where we are going," said the priest,

pointing to the hovel. "There is a sick man there. I heard his confession and gave him Holy Communion a few days ago, but did not consider it necessary to anoint him until this evening when he was thought to be dying, and a messenger came, saying that he wished me to come immediately and bring you as he wanted to see you before he died."

By this time they had reached the hut, and as the priest helped Inez from the sleigh, she wondered who the sick man was and why he wished to see her.

The priest gave a gentle tap on the door, opened it and walked in. They were met by a tall, thin woman, whom Inez recognized at once as the mother of Bessie, the child by whose bedside she had watched three years before until death had relieved the little sufferer. During Inez's absence on the continent the family had left Torrence, and although she had made several inquiries about them she had until to-night been unable to learn of their whereabouts. While living in the village, although poor, they had a comfortable home, but here want seemed to stare them in the face. What they now called by the dignified name of home consisted only of two small rooms. The scanty furniture in them was of the poorest kind, while the dim light of a single candle and

the poor flickering fire in the grate gave the room a rather dismal aspect. In a little recess off from the first room was a poor bed on which the sufferer lie asleep.

“I am so glad you have come, Inez,” said the woman, “but I hardly dared expect you on such a stormy night. I would not have sent for you but I feared that my husband could not live until morning and he insisted upon seeing you to-night. He has talked of you a great deal during his sickness and said that he would like to see you, but I thought it was a mere whim of his until this afternoon, when he told me he could not die without seeing you. I do not know why, unless it was because you were so kind to our little Bessie. He has never been the same since our darling died and I have often thought he would kill himself worrying about her.”

The man turned restlessly upon his pillow and awoke; he cast an eager glance around the room until his eyes rested upon the priest, who advanced toward his bed. “I am glad you have come, Father,” he said faintly, “but did you bring Inez?” The priest told him she was there. “Thank God,” he said, “please leave her alone with me for a few minutes.”

The priest and the man's wife retreated to the

little adjoining room, while Inez stepped up to the bed side and asked the man what she could do for him.

“Please sit in that chair at the head of my bed,” he answered, “I have something to tell you.

“Inez obeyed, and the man after looking around the room to see that no one else was present, said in a low trembling voice, “I have sent for you to-night to ask your forgiveness for a great injury I have done you. Please grant it to me, for without it I cannot die in peace.”

“I know of no injury you could have done me,” said Inez, “but if you have done me any I will forgive you.”

“It is easy for you to say that you will forgive me, but when you know what it is—he paused for a moment as if unable to go farther, then continued with a voice that sounded very unnatural, “Five years ago to-night, Inez, I murdered the one who in two days more would have made you his happy bride.”

The blood almost froze in the young girl's veins as she heard these words, her face turned deathly pale and she sat rigid and motionless as a statue.

To think that she was now in the presence of Walter Tracy's murderer—and he one whom she

had always trusted and believed to be one of the best of men—was almost more than she could bear. In a moment it came back to her how strangely he had acted toward her when his little girl died and how he had rejected all of her kindness toward his family. She knew now why it was.

“You Walter Tracy’s murderer,” she murmured, “my God, it cannot be possible; I cannot believe it.”

“It is true,” said the man, “but it was not altogether my fault, for I loved you from your childhood as I would the daughter of one who had ever been a kind friend and helper to me. No one received the news of your coming marriage with more joy than I, for I always felt that you two were well suited for each other and I was glad, too, because I knew that your father’s heart was set on seeing you the wife of his young friend, I wished you every happiness from the bottom of my heart, but then at the last moment the evil tempter came. I was very poor and needed money badly at that time to pay a debt which I owed, but saw no way of getting it unless I asked your father to lend it to me. This I did not wish to do, for he had already done so much for me that I felt that I would be imposing on him, and as for

getting it dishonestly it never occurred to me until—he paused for a moment, drew a deep sigh and continued, a man, who in some way unknown to me had learned my circumstances, came to me two days before Christmas and offered me a hundred pounds if I would do him a favor. A hundred pounds was a large fortune in my eyes, and now that I needed it so much I promised to do anything he wished, little dreaming what the favor was to be; I soon learned, however, that it was to commit a murder.

“I refused at first to comply with his evil desires, but he had given me the money, and when he saw how I hesitated he laid fifty pounds more beside it, saying as he did so that he hoped I was ready to listen to his plans as he had little time for delay that evening and could not see me again until it was too late. The temptation at the sight of the money was too great for me, so I entered at once into confidence with him, selling my peace of mind to my seducer and my soul to Satan. He told me his plans for the crime, which was to be committed, in such a way that I could not help making good my escape. He told me that he knew me to be one of the last ones on whom any shadow of suspicion could fall and promised to do all in his power to save me from it. After he was

gone I laid the money away and took the greatest care to keep it hid from my wife, who was a sincere Christian and whose heart would have been broken could she have known that I ever thought of committing so terrible a deed, even though my reward in gold might have been a thousand times greater than it was."

"On Christmas eve when my dear little Bessie kissed me good night and asked God to bless papa and mamma and give them a merry Christmas, it seemed as if the innocent child were cursing me and I must break my promise to that cowardly man, but no, the money was in my possession and I must do his work or lose it and perhaps he might do me some great injury if I refused."

"My wife was not feeling very well that evening and could not go to midnight Mass, but I went out just as the bell rang for Mass and made her believe that I went. Instead of going to the church I went and hid myself in one of the out-houses belonging to the mansion until it was time for Mass to be over, then took my place under the window where I had been told to wait for the company to return to the hall. The man who had hired me to commit the crime was one of your most honored guests that evening and he took special pains to see that his victim stood in front

of the window where he had told me to wait. He, himself, had called him there and was talking to him when I drew my pistol and fired the fatal shot."

"It was the work of only a moment and the next thing for me to do was to make my escape. I did not even dare to look in the window to see the effect of the shot, but ran across the lots, throwing my pistol in the river as I passed it, and did not stop until I had reached home. I retired, but not to rest, for it was a long and miserable night to me and it seemed to me as if morning would never come. Every sound I heard I thought was some one coming to arrest me, even the howling of the wind I imagined was the echo of the cry my victim must have uttered if the ball struck him, but, oh! how I hoped that it had not. No one came near my home, for the author of my crime kept his promise in trying to divert suspicion from anyone living in my part of the village."

"In the morning when the news of the murder reached me and I had heard the words of sympathy spoken in your behalf by my wife, it seemed as if I could not bear the remorse and in my misery I wished that I, myself, had been the victim. Oh! for that perfect tranquillity and peace of mind I had felt the Christmas before, but it was gone, never to return. My wife knelt down and

prayed for the departed soul, also for the repentance and forgiveness of the murderer, little dreaming that she was offering up prayers for her own wretched husband; I had to go to Mass with her and my dear little Bessie and listen to the prayers said for him there, (I cannot mention his name) but harder still was it for me to attend the funeral with them and there meet the assassin face to face. That afternoon he called on me to assure me that I was not suspected and to tell me to keep up my courage and I would probably never be found out. He left Torrence the same week and it was three years before I heard from him again."

The sick man paused from exhaustion, and Inez fearing that his voice had left him, turned to beckon to the priest who was sitting near the door in the next room, when he laid his hand upon her arm and said in a hoarse whisper, "I have not finished yet, I have not told you who that cold-hearted criminal was."

"In the name of Walter Tracy I forgive you," said Inez with a great effort, "and pray God to do the same as Walter did with his dying breath. I feel very sorry for you and do not think you are as much to be blamed as the one who caused you to commit the deed, but please grant me this favor. I'd rather not have you mention his name, for I

do not want to know who he is."

"But you must know, for it may save you many years of unhappiness. I cannot die without telling you, and that was one reason why I was so anxious to see you. Do you remember the night that my little girl died?"

Inez bowed in affirmative, and he continued, "It was then that I heard from that man for the first time after he went away. I was thinking of him and of the just punishment it would be for me to lose my darling who was the greatest treasure I had on earth. I cursed him in my heart and was wondering where he was, hoping that he might yet suffer more than I had when you came in with his name on your lips. You said that you could not come before because Sir Edward Sarsdale had been at your home. How I longed to tell you all then, and put you on your guard against that cold-hearted villain whose only motive for the crime was jealousy, for he wished to fill the place of his victim. In my misery I cared not for his wrath, but dreaded, for the sake of my dear wife and child to let it be known that I was the murderer."

"Sir Edward Sarsdale!" Inez repeated in astonishment when she heard his name mentioned. She scarcely heard the last words, for the shock

she received when she heard Sir Edward's name mentioned was as great as when she had learned that she was in the presence of Walter Tracy's murderer. Why had she so distrusted Sir Edward she had often asked herself without being able to solve the question, but she knew now, and hoped that she might never again behold his face.

The dying man was again speaking, which roused her to her senses. "You know, Inez," he said, that for some time previous to my little girl's death I was very neglectful of my religious duties. It commenced the night that I committed that crime, for I dared not face the priest in the confessional with that stain on my soul, and I believe that I never would, had it not been for the promise I made my child when she was dying. The Sunday after her death I approached the sacraments for the first time in over three years and made a resolution then that if I ever learned that you were to marry Sir Edward Sarsdale I should prevent it by telling you of his crime. I told the priest to tell you in case I should die without telling you, so you see I have repented my folly and have saved you from that man, whatever the cost to me might have been."

"I have one thing more to ask," he continued, "It is that you will never reveal what I have told

you; not that I wish to hide my crime for my own sake, but for the sake of my poor wife who has already seen enough sorrow, and whom I never wish to know what I have done, and for my child, the memory of whose name I do not wish to have marred by letting the world know of her father's dark deed. There was no need asking Inez to keep the secret, for to her forgiveness meant silence, and she would rather suffer anything than ever betray what had been told her.

Inez knelt by the bedside with the man's wife while the last sacraments were being administered, and in spite of the great injury he had done her, she could not look upon his pale face without the deepest feelings of sympathy. How haggard and careworn that face was. Suffering and remorse had indeed left deep lines there which plainly told that he had been punished for his crime, while the tearful eyes, which rested now and then on her face would almost have softened a heart of stone.

For some hours after the priest and Inez left him the man seemed much easier than he had been for many days, and his wife began to entertain some hopes that he might yet be spared her. 'Twas only the refreshing effect of the sacraments and the freedom of mind which he felt on knowing that at last Inez knew his secret and had forgiven

him, combined with that supernatural strength which often precedes death. Early in the morning the change came, and in a few minutes he passed away without a struggle.

It wanted but a few minutes of twelve when the priest and Inez reached Torrence, and the latter would have gone home, but she was to sing at midnight mass, and she would not disappoint the people who had expected to hear her. With this new secret in her mind, it seemed as if she would never again find voice to sing, and many times during the Mass she felt that her voice trembled and she must break down; but she stood by the organ until it was over and many declared that her voice had never sounded as sweet as it did that night.

Three days passed and the morning of the funeral came. Each stroke of the tolling bell seemed to pierce her heart like a sword, and the memories of that other funeral which took place five years ago, rushed upon her mind with new vividness. Although she never once looked from her window, she knew when the coffin was carried into the church and when it was taken out. Silently she sat with her back to the window, offering now and then a silent prayer for the poor man's soul, until she thought that all was over; then, for

the first time she turned toward the cemetery. The funeral train, which consisted of only a few of the villagers, with one solitary mourner, the man's wife, was just leaving the cemetery. Gleaming like a tall white statue among the ever-greens stood the Tracy monument, among which so many names of honored members of the family had been carved, and almost within the shadow that same marble shaft lay the one who had banished the noble name from the earth.

The murder was now partly avenged, and the hands that had committed that dark deed were clasped forever, while the one who had caused it was enjoying a gay existence in his London home, surrounded by scores of friends, and without a shadow of remorse in his hardened heart.

Side by side the murderer and murdered now slept waiting for the judgment day, when their secret should be made known. As for the three living persons who possessed it, it would never be revealed unless Sir Edward should repent and make his crime known, which, in all probability, he would never do. For the priest, 'twas a secret of the confessional, over which a secret veil of deep and everlasting silence is thrown; while for Inez the memory of the promises made Walter Tracy alone would have caused her to keep silent only

for no other reason.

Happily for Inez Sir Edward did not visit Torrence for several months, and she was beginning to think that he would not trouble her again, when one day early the following autumn he arrived quite unexpectedly to pay Lord Ashleigh a few day's visit and to renew his entreaties to Inez, whom he had resolved not to give up too easily. Inez met him very coolly, but betrayed no signs of emotion. Several times he sought an opportunity to speak to her alone, but she kept her own room nearly all of the time, never seeing him excepting when she met him at the table, and a few times in the parlor with the family. She even absented herself from the daily Mass, which she was seldom known to miss, because she knew if she went he would be there. In her presence he was very agreeable, trying to lavish every possible attention upon her only to be met with almost disdainful coldness.

He lengthened the few days visit to over three weeks and when the day of his departure came Inez refused to see him to bid him good-bye. Her father was greatly angered at this but said nothing to her until the next day when he sent for her to come to his room. When she entered she was met by a stern, scornful look which she had never

before seen on his face and which caused her to shrink from him. He motioned her to a chair in front of him.

“Inez,” he said in a firm voice, “I would like to have you explain to me what you mean by treating one of your best and truest friends as you have the man who left here yesterday.”

No answer came and he continued: “At first I overlooked your coolness toward him trusting that in time it would pass away but to my grief I notice that each time he visits us you are more distant than ever. In my love for you my child I have hitherto refrained from chiding you for your conduct, but seeing that by it you are ruining your own happiness as well as that of your own parents I can keep silent no longer. Think of the great interest Sir Edward has taken in you ever since that fatal night when that great misfortune befell you. It was he who for your sake worked most diligently to clear up that mystery which, alas, is yet unsolved.”

How Inez longed to cry out that he had worked to hide his own crime, but no, she could not betray her secret and it must go with her to the grave.

Her father went on: “Having failed his next effort was to recall you from the melancholy life

you were leading and he made many noble sacrifices in order to secure your happiness, but you, ungrateful girl treated him with disdain for it. He has borne with it all offering kindness for insult and is still willing to overlook it all and make you his adored bride if you will but give your consent. I know you have refused him several times but consider well what you are doing before you do so again."

"I have considered it well, father," she answered, "and cannot marry him or anyone else."

"My child," said her father, appearing not to notice her answer, "You know that it has caused us all untold grief to see what a sad existence you have been leading for nearly six years and it will break our hearts to see you continue thus much longer. Our greatest hope has been to see you the happy wife of some one who is worthy of you and I know of no one who would make you a better husband than Sir Edward. He has one of the noblest, truest hearts of any man I ever knew"—Inez shuddered at these words—"and he is one who could not fail to make you happy. You know too that his wealth is very great and he is a decendent of one of England's noblest families."

"Father," said Inez in a trembling voice "the memory of Walter Tracy is too sacred for me ever

to allow any one to fill the place that was to have been his. I promised him only a few minutes before he died that I would never marry and I shall keep that promise."

"Did he ask you to make such a promise?" asked her father.

"No, father, he did not ask me to make it," she answered, "I made it of my own free will, and when I saw the pleasure it gave him in those the last moments of his life, I did not regret it nor have I since, and having made it I shall never break it."

"Foolish girl," said her father in a tone bordering on anger, "could Walter Tracy now speak to you, I know he would far rather see you married to this most worthy of men than see you unhappy as you are."

"Father," Inez murmured, "as I have often told you before, I can hope for no greater happiness than what I now enjoy in living a single life and doing good where I can, while, on the other hand, what you have chosen for me would be a life of untold misery."

"Then you refuse to obey me?" said her father sternly.

"I am sorry to disobey you, father," said Inez, "but I must repeat what I have so often said be-

fore, I shall never marry Sir Edward or any one else."

"Inez," said her father after a moment's hesitation, as if considering whether or not it was best to say what was in his mind, "do you remember Count C—— whom we met in Paris two years ago?"

Inez bowed in the affirmative and her father continued: "There was one thing I did not intend to tell you but since you are so persistent in following your own stubborn will I cannot resist telling you of the ruin it has brought upon this young man."

Inez looked at him half inquiringly, half beseeching him not to finish but he went on, "I have learned that after you refused to marry him he did not return home as he said he would but remained in Paris hoping that he might meet you again and that he might win you, but after you had left Paris he became so discouraged by the thoughts of your heartlessness that he took to drinking very heavily to kill his grief. I am informed that he fell in with evil associates and sinking lower and lower until at last his property being nearly all squandered, he returned to the hotel where he was staying late one night and was found dead in his room the next morning. He had

committed suicide by cutting his own throat.

Now Inez you see what your stubbornness has done. Will you still persist in it? If you had married the count as your mother and I wished you to you would have saved him from such a terrible death and been happy with him now."

Inez turned deathly pale as she thought of such a dreadful fate befalling one whom she remembered as one of the noblest men she had ever met—and she the cause of it—but how could it be so when he had so manfully given her up? There must be some mistake, some misunderstanding.

As soon as she found voice to speak she said: "Father, who told you that?"

"Sir Edward," was the reply. "He was in Paris at the time and saw the count after he was dead. He said that dissipation had so changed him since he last saw him just after we left Paris that his old friends would hardly have recognized him."

"And did you hear it from any other source?" asked Inez.

"No," said her father, "and how could I, for no one else that I have seen since we left Paris knew the count and if they did they perhaps did not know that he was a friend of ours and consequently thinking that we were not interested in

him would tell us nothing about him."

Inez felt relieved for she distrusted Sir Edward and felt that there might possibly be no foundation for his story.

"Now Inez," said Lord Ashleigh, "do you refuse to obey me, or have you after learning what grief you have already caused one noble man, think better of your rash resolution never to marry and consent to become Lady Sarsdale and the mistress of the beautiful Sarsdale hall?"

"My mind is still unchanged, father," she answered, "and will remain so. If what you have told me about Count C—— is true I am very sorry for him and shall continue all my life to lament the fate which first brought me in his way, but as for marrying Sir Edward I can never do it."

No longer able to resist his anger, Lord Ashleigh said, "Inez, I will give you your choice between two things, either promise me that you will marry Sir Edward or I will disown you forever as my child and heir and you must leave my roof. Which will you do?"

"Father," she answered, "you may disown me if you wish and I will go for I would far rather be a wanderer alone in a strange land and beg for my bread than be mistress of his home."

She arose to leave the room but her father called her back and said, "Inez, consider well what you are doing and take back your fatal choice before it is too late."

"Father, I have chosen for the better," was her only reply.

"Do not call me father," he said in an angry voice, "for you have chosen to be disowned by me and you are no longer my child, so go now ungrateful child and never let me behold your face again."

"Farewell," she said, the word father which she dared not utter again trembling on her lips, and then half to herself she added, "if you only knew all you would not blame me as you do now," and he heard those words distinctly.

Inez was gone and for nearly an hour Lord Ashleigh sat in his chair like one distracted. His only thought was that he had been obliged to disown and drive from her home his only daughter on whom he had centered so many bright hopes that he might one day see her a queen of society loved and honored by some of the most aristocratic people in England and the happy wife of one whose wealth and position made him so well worthy of her.

Lady Ashleigh had gone away that morning to

spend a few days and he dreaded her return when he must tell her what he had done but consoled himself by thinking that Inez might think better of her rash choice and not go.

Oh ! could that father have but seen her as in passing the door of the great hall which was kept closed, she turned the key and softly glided in to take one more glance at the blood stain on the floor and offer a prayer for—not the victim—but the murderer, Sir Edward; could he have seen her too when reaching her own room she took from her own wardrobe the pale blue silk dress she had worn on that fatal night and wept until her tears falling on the deep red spots had made them as moist as when they flowed from Walter Tracy's death wound. If he had seen this his heart might have been softened.

At last he arose and walking to the window looked out. The cemetery was in sight and he saw Inez as she slowly approached the Tracy lot kneel at Walter's grave. For a long time she remained there shedding a silent farewell tear upon the cold clay then plucking a single flower from the grave arose but not to leave the cemetery as her father expected she would. She knelt for only a minute at another grave that had been made little less than a year ago and there offered

a silent prayer for the living and the dead. With another lingering glance at the Tracy monument she soon disappeared from sight. A north bound train arrived in a few minutes and the few people who saw her board it did not dream that they would never again see the one who had been so dear a friend to them.

CHAPTER V.

SEVEN years went by and nothing had been heard from Inez since the day her father so angrily disowned her and sent her from her home. Many times had he sadly regretted his rashness and had hoped against hope that she might return home or that he could find her. Oh to see her long enough to ask her forgiveness for the sorrow he had caused her and he would atone for it by making her home as happy for her as possible. He blamed himself for not having called her back to explain the last words he had heard her speak, "Father, if you only knew all you would not blame me." These words had resounded again and again in his ears and he could not banish them. If he had only asked her the meaning of them perhaps she might never have left home, he would often say to himself, but in that hour of anger he had thought of nothing but her disobedience. Could that mysterious all be connected in any way with Sir Edward, or did she refer to something she knew concerning the murder of Walter Tracy. These two thoughts had often occurred to him separately, but never once had his mind combined them, for

such a thing would be impossible. All he knew was Inez had gone away with some hidden secret and he wished to know what it was.

How lonely the old mansion had been without her, and how its inmates missed that sweet face which even though it always bore an expression of sadness had behind it a bright and cheerful smile for all. It seemed if no life or happiness remained in her home after she was gone, while the poor of the village whom she had so often assisted missed her hardly less than her own.

It is a glorious evening in the lovely month of May when we meet a party of English tourists in Southern Italy. They are four in number, three of whom we recognize as Lord and Lady Ashleigh and their son, while the other is their son's wife. They had been walking in the country and it was nearly sunset when they reached a beautiful green hill, on whose brow was the convent of St. ——. They ascended the hill, and from a point just west of the convent sat down to watch the sunset. Below them lie a picturesque green valley with a pearly stream running through it and studded here and there with wild trees and shrubbery peculiar to that sunny climate; another lower elevation rose on the other side of the valley and just beyond was the shores of that great sea which

stretches along the entire southern coast of Europe. The golden sun was just above the horizon and the bright clouds of red and gold, with the blue sky above, reflected in the still blue waters of the Mediterranean, gave the scene a very beautiful aspect.

They silently admired the grandeurs before them as if fearing that the least sound made by them would be an almost sacrilegious profanation of the atmosphere surrounding them. The younger lady was the first to break the silence.

Half turning toward the convent, she said, "What a beautiful spot the nuns have chosen for their home. It seems as if all nature speaks the praises of the Creator there."

"Yes," said Lady Ashleigh, "it almost seems like an enchanted place and how happy the inmates of that convent must be so far away from the cares of the busy world with only the wonderful works of nature to look upon." Her tone told that her mind was wandering. She was thinking of Inez, who she always felt had found a home in some place like this. "It is just what is suited to her, she thought, and if I could only be sure that she had found rest in such a beautiful abode— just then the sweet strains of the 'O Salutaris' broke upon their ears. Involuntarily

the party sank upon their knees and in their hearts joined the devotions going on within those blissful walls. The voices ceased and all was silent for a moment, excepting the faint tinkling of a little bell which reminded them that the Maker of heaven and earth was raised to give His blessing to the kneeling figures before the altar."

In that sublime moment Lady Ashleigh renewed with a greater devotion than ever before the prayer that she might soon find her daughter and that she might still be unchanged from the devout and pious girl she had been at home.

Presently the voice of one nun sweeter and louder than the others, yet mingled with a strain of sadness, was heard singing the "Magnificat" alone. It was one of those sweet angelic voices that would almost remind one they were listening to a voice from above, and that voice if once heard could never be forgotten. Lady Ashleigh turned deathly pale as she listened, for but one person in the world could sing like that. She looked at her husband and saw that he too recognized the voice. It was Inez.

The next day, which was Sunday, the two ladies having obtained permission to attend Mass at the convent, set out early in the morning to go to it, one with a light heart at the hope that she would

soon see her daughter, the other wondering what had wrought such a change in her husband's father and mother since the evening before. Although she knew the story of Inez, it did not occur to her that there was any possibility of finding her, and neither Lord or Lady Ashleigh had said anything of the hope that was in their minds.

When Mass was over they stood at the chapel door as the nuns passed out. Lady Ashleigh scanned each face and was beginning to think that she had been deceived in the voice, when Inez, now Sister Agnes, passed before her, turning her eyes neither to the right or left. The mother's first impulse was to clasp her in her arms and claim her as her own long-lost child, but instead she went to the parlor and asked to see the Mother Superior. The kind sister was very much touched by the story she heard from Lady Ashleigh, and when it was finished Inez was sent for.

The meeting between mother and daughter was a very affecting one, each being overjoyed to see the other, but still more affecting was the one which took place that afternoon when Lord Ashleigh and his son called on her. The father begged his daughter's forgiveness for sending her from home and said he would be very happy to have her with him again, but told her if she were

happy where she was he would be content to leave her there, where he knew she would be safe from all harm. In the joy of finding her, he forgot to ask her what she meant by the words that had haunted him so long and it was better so, for from her lips he would never receive an explanation. His dear Inez was well and happy and had told him that she had never for a moment felt any hard feelings toward him, not even when he sent her from home, but forgave him with her whole heart. That was all he cared for now and he felt that he could go home and spend the remainder of his years in peace.

Close upon the track of our friends followed another. It was Sir Edward traveling in disguise and passing as an American who was in Europe for the first time. His blonde hair was dyed to a dark brown, and his face which he had always kept closely shaved, was covered by a heavy dark beard of the same shade as his hair.

Since Inez departure from home he had only paid her father two or three short visits, but he had watched very closely for tidings from the absent one, resolving that if she were found he would marry her or have his revenge. He often spent several weeks at a time in the neighborhood of her old home, and whenever her parents went

away for any length of time he would follow them, sometimes in one disguise and sometimes in another. By study and practice he had become a skilled detective. Sometimes he kept quite a distance behind them, sending his valet ahead to watch them, but often staid in the same place with them, even stooping at the same hotel, and so complete was his disguise that they met him several times at the table without recognizing him.

He saw Lady Ashleigh and her daughter-in-law when they left the hotel the morning they attended Mass at the convent, and sent his valet to follow them. He learned from a conversation he had overheard on their way home what their mission to the convent had been, and also learned that Inez was there and her name in religion. Sir Edward waited until after her friends had returned to England, then went to the convent undisguised, and asked to see Sister Agnes, saying that he had been sent to her with a message from her father. When Inez entered the parlor he stepped up to her and offered his hand, but she only returned a cold glance which told him he was unwelcome.

“Inez,” he said in his old familiar tone, appearing not to notice the expression on her face, “don’t you recognize me?”

“Yes,” she answered coldly, “but what is your business here?”

“I have come,” he answered, “to ask you to leave this place of confinement and go with me, where you will be happy.” She motioned him to stop, but he went on. “You know, Inez, that I have always loved you, loved you more than any one else ever could,” even Walter Tracy he would have said, but he dared not utter his name, “and I love you still, although you have treated me so cruelly, and will forgive and forget the past if you will but leave this place and come with me.”

“Sir Edward,” she said, advancing toward the door and making a motion to open it, “leave me immediately, or I shall be obliged to call the superior and have you put out. You know you have no business intruding upon me in this way.”

“I suppose it is against the rules of this house where you are shut away from every enjoyment, and buried, as it were, in a tomb for the living; but it was only my uninterested love for you that has prompted this act which you call intruding upon you, and you should not treat me thus. I have sought you everywhere during these past seven years, and for your sake I have scorned many a fair and queenly maiden who would have been glad of a place in my heart and home which only you

could fill, and now that I have found you, I cannot give you up. Will you not break the bars of your cage, my pretty bird, and flee with me to freedom and happiness?"

"I have told you to leave me," said Sister Agnes, "and I wish you to go at once, for I seek no other happiness than what I enjoy in this blissful home, and I shall never leave it." She pointed to the door, but he did not move.

"You shall regret this," he said in a low angry tone, at the same time putting his hand in his breast pocket and drawing out a stiletto, while with the other hand he seized her arm. "Now throw off that dark habit and flee with me or die."

"Death rather than leave here," she murmured; then almost involuntarily the words fell from her lips, "Oh, my God, let not my blood be on the same hands that caused the death of Walter Tracy." She had hardly intended that he should hear this prayer, but he heard it, and one glance at her face told him that she knew his secret; but this only increased his anger, and she must die or she might betray him.

A cry broke from her lips as he made a motion to plunge the blade in her heart. He let go of her arm, at the same time letting her fall senseless to

the floor, and fled. Her cry brought some of the sisters to the room, and they found her lying motionless as though she were dead; but she was still breathing. She had raised her left arm, which was free to ward off the blow, and had received a fearful wound, which caused her many weeks of suffering and paralysis of the arm, which was never of any use to her afterwards.

One afternoon, five years later, Lord Ashleigh was sitting by the window of his room when he saw a man enter the cemetery. He was dressed as a pilgrim, but there was something familiar about him that reminded the lord of some one he had seen before, but he could not recall who. The man never turned his face toward the mansion, but walked slowly to the Tracy lot. Prostrating himself at the foot of Walter's grave he knelt there for a long time, apparently overcome with grief. He arose at last, but instead of leaving the cemetery, advanced toward a group of three graves, at the head of the smallest of these was a stone marked "Bessie, aged 11." He knelt for a while at the grave at the right; then with bowed head left the cemetery and walked down the street. Lord Ashleigh was amazed at what he saw for this stranger had visited the same two graves that Inez had twelve years before, and his

movements were almost the same as her's had been.

The next day the lord received a letter written in the old familiar hand of Sir Edward, from whom he had not heard for several years. The letter which had been written the previous evening contained an entire confession of the crime. Nothing was omitted in the details from the time that, becoming jealous of Walter Tracy, he had been tempted to have him put out of the way until he had so boldly intruded upon Inez, and tried to murder her. He told, too, how, afterwards being jealous of Count C——, whom he feared Inez might marry if she ever met him again, which he believed she would, as he contemplated visiting Torrence the summer she went away, he had made him believe that she was soon to become his own bride, while to Lord Ashleigh he told the story of his sad death. Count C——, he wrote, bearing bravely the disappointment of being rejected by Inez, had returned home with a faint hope that she might some time change her mind, and had never given up to drink, as he had accused him of doing. Three years ago he had married a beautiful American heiress, and with her and one lovely child who bore the name of Inez, was now living happily in his grand castle

on the banks of the Rhine.

In conclusion he wrote: "I came to Torrence this afternoon with the intention of calling on you and telling you what I have written. When I reached the cemetery and saw the graves of my victims then thought of the sorrow I had caused in your family, I had not the courage to meet you and could not go farther. I hardly dare ask your forgiveness after having done you so great an injury but I do ask that for the sake of my mother who does not suspect her son's crime and my honored brothers and sisters that you will keep what I have told you as a secret. In a few days I shall bid farewell to all who have ever known me and go where I can spend the remainder of my life in repentance for my folly and none of them shall ever hear from me again."

Lord Ashleigh after reading the letter sat like one spellbound unable to move or speak. For this tyrant and murderer had caused his loving, his only daughter many months of suffering by participating in his wicked plans against her, and then, because he had met with failure, he had rashly disowned her and driven her from home. Inez's parting words came back to him with new vividness now. "Father if you only knew all you would not blame me." He knew all now

and how he regretted his unkindness to her. Inez had in all probability known Sir Edward's secret before she went away, but in her charity that sweet girl had submitted to every torture which his presence in her home had caused her and lastly given up her home and all that was dear to her rather than betray one of her father's trusted friends by betraying her secret.

There was sorrow in Sarsdale hall in London when a few days later the oldest son made it known to the family that he was about to leave home soon to return no more. From his youth he had been very reckless and has caused his widowed mother many bitter tears but despite of this she loved her oldest child most tenderly and was very happy to see him repent his youthful folly but did not wish him to leave her in her old age. He answered her that he did not feel worthy of his place in the family and that he intended spending the remainder of his life away from the world in some religious order but refused to tell where. The next day after signing his property over to his brothers and sisters he bade farewell to all and left home. The name of Sir Edward Sarsdale soon became only as a memory of the past to his friends and he might as well have slept in the grave for he was never seen or heard from

again.

Many years have passed and in a monastery of the La Trappists in southern France is an aged gray-haired monk. He has been in the order for years but who he is or whence he came nobody knows. Although his life is most humble, he cannot hide the fact from a close observer that he once belonged to the higher class of society. He is noted for his great piety and the austere spirit of penance which he practices, but never is he more devout than on Christmas eve when he spends the whole night praying for the souls of his two victims silently resting under the snows of a beautiful cemetery in Southern England. Nor does Sir Edward—for it is he—forget to offer an occasional prayer for the dear little sister who now sweetly sleeps under the blue Italian skies on the brow of the hill near the convent.

Inez's death had been as beautiful as her life. For many weeks she had been lingering almost between life and death. Each day was thought to be her last but she would tell the sister who was her most faithful attendant that her time had not yet come as she felt that her mission was not yet accomplished but she hoped it would be soon. What that mission was no one knew until one evening only a few days after Lord Ashleigh had

learned Sir Edward's, secret a letter came for Sister St. Agnes. "Please read it for me," she said to the Mother Superior who brought it to her. It was from her father and told her that her prayer had been answered at last for Sir Edward had repented and confessed his crime.

Her eyes filled with tears of gladness for since the night of Walter Tracy's death her one prayer had been that she might not die until she learned that his murderer had repented and now that the gladsome tidings had come she felt that she was free. That night she died thanking God for Sir Edward's conversion.

Lord and Lady Ashleigh have joined their daughter and their names stand beside hers on the family monument. The mansion is now occupied by their son while their only grandchild, Inez, is married and occupies the old Tracy homestead near Torrence.

In the Tracy mansion in London whose rooms had on so many brilliant occasions in years gone by been filled with noblemen and ladies of the first families of England, may be seen throngs of orphan children who in this peaceful abode are cared for as tenderly by the nuns as if they were in the homes of their own parents. The grand ball room no more resounds with brilliant music

keeping time with the dancer's step, only a sweet toned organ stands where the piano and other musical instruments were while in the other end of the hall is a beautiful little altar where the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is celebrated each morning. Inez had given this pleasant home to the orphans and many a homeless waif had been made happy within its walls.

THE END
OF
A HEROINE OF CHARITY.

FARMER CARSON'S SONS.

CHAPTER I.

IT was Thanksgiving eve and the Carson family were all together for the first time in five years, and how happy they were to-night! All, I said, yes, all excepting one. This was their oldest child, a son who had been kidnapped nineteen years ago last summer, when he was a little over six years old.

The family at the time were living in a little town in Vermont and had three children, two sons and a daughter. A traveling agent who had been canvassing the surrounding country for several weeks was boarding at their home. He was greatly attached to the children and scarcely a day passed that he did not bring them something on his return from his rounds. He would often take little Eddie, the oldest one, who was his favorite, out for a ride or a stroll in the country. The parents always trusted the children with him, thinking he would never let any harm befall them. One afternoon he took Eddie out for a walk, say-

ing that he would return with him before supper time. Mrs. Carson watched them as they went down the street, and when they were out of sight she returned to her work.

The hours passed and supper time came, but the man had not returned with her boy. They waited for them about half an hour, and as they did not come the family sat down to supper, expecting to see them come in any minute. As it began to grow dark, and still they did not return, the parents became alarmed and a search was commenced for them. Someone had last seen them on the edge of a dense forest near the village, and all of the men in the village turned out to join in searching the woods, but returned without the missing ones. The next heard of them was that they had been seen boarding a west-bound train in a village about ten miles distant, just after midnight, on the night of their disappearance. This was the last tidings that the parents ever had of their boy. About a year later they moved to Ohio, where they were now living on a farm.

The heart-broken parents never could quite give up their boy, and in all these years there had never been a Thanksgiving or a Christmas that a plate and a vacant chair had not been set at the table for the boy who, Mr. Carson always said

would return some day to spend some of those days with them. "I hope our little Eddie will come home soon," his wife would say as she sat the plate for him, but in her heart she felt that he was dead.

Clara, the oldest girl, who was twenty-four, had been married five years ago this Thanksgiving and immediately gone west with her husband. The two boys, next younger, had been away from home two years, one in Buffalo, the other in New York. Five more children, three girls and two boys, the youngest of whom was nine years old, were at home. None of the absent ones had been home before since they went away, but they were all here now to celebrate the fifth anniversary of Clara's marriage. Clara, her husband and two children had come that morning, and Charlie and Frank had just arrived on the afternoon train.

Supper was announced and the family gathered at the table, which was large enough for them all, not forgetting the vacant chair which was put there in honor of this being the first meal the family ate together. All were seated and the father asked the usual blessing on all of the family, especially the lost boy, whom he besought God to make a good man and bring back to his parents. The meal was spent in talking over old

times when the family were all at home, then the conversation drifted upon the absent one.

“Do you know,” said Mr. Carson, “it almost seems as if our Eddie were near us now, and I cannot give up the thought that he will come home to us some time.”

His wife looked at him but did not answer him as she had often done, by telling that what he said was only his imagination, for she too had a strange feeling in regard to the lost boy, but would not mention it. “I suppose it is because the family are all here to-night,” she thought, “but Eddie will never return.”

When supper was over, all but two of the girls who were to “do up the supper work” went to the large old-fashioned parlor and gathered around the big fire-place as the family had so often done when they were all at home. Mr. Carson, with his pipe in his mouth and his little grandson on his knee, was a perfect picture of contentment, while his wife whose fingers were never idle and who was now knitting a pair of mittens for that same little grandson, looked equally happy. For a few minutes she worked most diligently, for she was on the thumb of the second mitten, and when it was finished she laid down her needles, saying, “Come here, Eddie, and let me see how these fit.”

The boy bounded from his grandfather's knee and going over to her held out two little chubby hands to have them tried on. A tear trickled down her cheeks, for she thought of that other Eddie for whom she used to knit mittens and to whom this child bore a very strong resemblance.

"Those are for your birthday, darling," she said, kissing him, "and turning to her husband, said, "Our little Eddie will be four years old tomorrow and as I look at him I almost imagine that we have our own boy back, he has grown so much like him."

Her husband looked at the child, then at his wife, and said, "I know we will have our own Eddie back some time."

Just then a rap came to the door and Mrs. Carson opened it to admit their next door neighbor, Mr. Gibson, and his son Tommie, a boy of about fifteen, who had come over to spend the evening.

"I am glad you have come," said Mr. Carson, "for you see we are all at home this evening and we like nothing better than having some of our neighbors here to enjoy with us the pleasure of our family reunion." Turning to his daughter, Grace, a girl of about fourteen, he said: "Won't you play and sing something for us, Grace?"

Grace took her place at the organ and after

lightly fingering the keys for a minute, commenced singing a sweet but simple country ballad in a clear, rich voice, which plainly told that only culture was needed to make her a very beautiful singer. Another song was called for and her mother suggested that she should sing her favorite Sunday School hymn, which she did, and then followed a duet by her brother and herself.

Mr. Gibson listened with interest and after she had left the organ he remarked: "That girl has a wonderfully fine voice and I could not help thinking how nice it would be for her to sing in the choir."

"Yes," said Mrs. Carson with an air of pride, "Grace certainly has a very sweet voice and our minister has spoken of having her sing in the choir, but thinks it is better for her to wait a year or two until her voice gets stronger. She is going to singing school this winter to practice and I think I'll have her take lessons from a teacher who is to be in town some time this winter. It will help her so much.

"Speaking of the choir," said Mr. Carson, addressing his neighbor, "reminds me that I heard you had a new minister at your church or were to have one."

"Yes," said Mr. Gibson, who unlike the Car-

sons was a Catholic, "our new priest has been here about three weeks and I think we shall like him very much."

"What kind of a looking man is he?" asked Mr. Carson, who was interested in any stranger of note who came to the neighboring village.

"He is quite young," answered Mr. Gibson, "and although apparently rather delicate, I think he is as fine a looking man as I ever saw."

"I met a very handsome young stranger this morning when I was going to the train to meet Clara and there was something so kind of familiar looking about him that I could not help being particularly struck by his appearance. I watched him and saw him go into the Catholic parsonage, so I think he must have been your new minister."

"Quite likely," said the other, then added, "But you should hear him preach; he preaches such beautiful sermons that it would do anyone good to hear him."

Mrs. Carson glanced at Clara and met her eyes in a look which told it was not altogether pleasant to have a Romanist thus interfering in her husband's religion in this way and trying to bring him to his church. "Its just like them," she thought, for as much as she respected the Gibson

family as neighbors, she could not banish from her mind the thought that they were Papists and she must always be on her guard lest they should try to ensnare some of her family into Romanism.

"It won't do him any good," she thought, just as she heard her husband answer, "I would like to hear him preach, but I could not understand him."

"Could not understand him, why not?" asked Mr. Gibson.

"Because," said Mr. Carson, "I have always heard that the Catholic ministers preach in a strange language that only members of their own church can understand."

Mr. Gibson could hardly repress a smile at this absurd remark, but how could he, who had never been in a Catholic church and only knew what he had been told by malicious persons as ignorant of Catholicity as himself, be blamed for his absurd ideas? "The Latin language is used for the divine ceremonies in every Catholic church in the world," he said, "but the people pray in their own language, whatever it may be, different portions of Holy Scriptures selected for each Sunday and feast day are read in their own language and a sermon preached on some text from one of these, so you see you can understand the sermon."

As Mr. Carson was quite anxious to know whether the gentleman he had met that morning was the new priest, and also wanted to hear him preach, he told his friend that he would go to church with him the next Sunday.

The frown deepened on Mrs. Carson's face at this announcement, for her husband was very careless about attending his own church, and very often she had tried in vain to persuade him to go with her. He was one of those kind whose motto is "One church is as good as another, and a man can be just as good if he attends no church at all." He lived up to the last part of this maxim, being an active member of no church, but simply going with his family occasionally to please them.

With his wife it was different. She had joined the church when quite young, and had always been a very strict member. She was trying to bring up her children as she herself had been brought up, and was very much grieved to see her husband setting such an example of carelessness before them. One more dreg was added to her cup of bitterness to-night, but she was determined to persuade him to go to his own church the next Sunday. It was to no avail, for his mind was set on going with Mr. Gibson, and he would go in spite of all she said or did to prevent it.

It was quite late when Mr. Gibson and his son went home, and soon after they were gone the Carson children bid their parents good-night and went to their own rooms, but Charlie; the oldest son, who had been in Buffalo, lingered behind the others. He had something he wished to tell his parents before returning to the city next morning, but had been almost afraid to mention it until he saw how interested his father was in the new priest. "Now is my time," he thought; "Father I think, will not object; but mother, what will she say?" He, like his father, had failed to notice the frown on his mother's face, or even then he would not have dared to tell what he did.

He had been keeping company with a Catholic girl in Buffalo for some time, and expected to be married just after the holidays. He did not tell them that the girl wished him to change his religion for her, and he had thought quite seriously of doing so, but waited to see what they thought of his coming marriage before mentioning that.

When Charlie mentioned the matter to them, Mr. Carson said nothing, for the thought of his son marrying a Catholic caused him to be too much bewildered to speak, especially when he thought how his wife would take it.

"I know you would like her mother," said Charlie, "as he saw that his mother looked displeased, for she is one of the kindest, truest girls I ever saw."

"I might like her," said his mother, "but oh, my son, how can you think of marrying her?" There was a tone of grief in her voice as she spoke.

"Why not, mother?" he asked.

"Charlie," she answered, "it grieves me very much to know that a child of mine could think of marrying a Catholic."

She paused for a moment, and as her son made no reply, but appeared to heed not her words, went on. "If you marry that girl you will not only cause a deep wound in your mother's heart, but in your own also. You will soon regret your folly, for you can never live in happiness with one whose religion differs so much from your own."

"Perhaps he might persuade her to become a Protestant with him," suggested Mr. Carson, who thought that his wife ought not to interfere too much with his son's rights after he had become of age.

"I am certain she will never do that," said Charlie.

“You had better give her up then,” said his mother, “for I know your marriage with her will only bring unhappiness to you both.”

He saw plainly that his mother would not consent to his marriage with a Catholic, and not wishing to have any further argument with her, bade her good night, telling her that he would think about what she had said. His father lingered for a moment in the room and whispered, “don’t worry, Charlie, about what your mother said, for it will be all right.”

Once in his own room, Charles Carson locked the door and sitting down drew from his pocket a picture of a sweet faced girl of about eighteen and a little boy perhaps ten years younger, who bore a strong resemblance to her. The girl was dressed in mourning and her only jewel was a small gold pin with a sodality medal of the Immaculate Conception attached to it, which showed that the wearer was a Child of Mary. This was Theresa Kinney, the girl whom he intended to make his wife and the boy her only brother. For some time he sat gazing at the fair young face, thinking of the original and of how his mother wished him to give her up because of her religion. At last as he replaced the picture in his pocket, he said half aloud: “No, Theresa, I will never

give you up for that or ask you to change your religion for me when I know you prize it so much. I would sooner become a Catholic myself than do so dishonorable a thing. He did not realize what becoming a Catholic meant, nor did he know yet how many months of preparation and diligent study were before him before he could become a member of that true Church which admits no one blind-folded within its doors, for one not brought up in the Catholic Church must thoroughly understand its doctrines before being admitted to it. Having learned them, there is no room for any doubt as to the infallible truth of each and every one of the doctrines it teaches, but how few outside the fold care to study them for this reason. They prefer rather to remain in darkness and ignorance, that they may still call themselves members of some one of the many so-called churches organized by men who have for one reason or another fallen from the true faith and wished to discard doctrines taught by Jesus Christ himself which they thought too severe for them.

Charlie did not mention Theresa's name to his mother again and she said nothing of her until he was leaving home the next evening, when she whispered to him that she hoped he would not forget her advice, and it would break her heart to see one

of her children marry a Catholic. "Please don't worry about me, mother," was the only answer he gave and from his tone she could not tell whether or not her words had any effect on him, but she believed they would save him from a life of unhappiness with one far inferior to him.

Thanksgiving passed very pleasantly, as it always did at the Carson farm house, and as usual the absent boy was not forgotten. Sunday morning had come, and Mr. Carson was one of the first in the house to be up and doing his morning's work in the barn so as to be ready when Mr. Gibson called for him to go to church. His wife watched him but said nothing to him until he put on his overcoat and hat and was about to leave home, when she called him back and told him to wait a minute, as the girls were not quite ready.

"I am not going with you to-day," he answered, "so there is no need of waiting, for the sleigh is at the door waiting for you and I can be of no more service to you now."

"Not going with us," said Mrs. Carson, "you don't intend to walk, I hope, when there is plenty of room in the sleigh?"

"Oh, no," he answered, "Mr. Gibson is waiting for me in front of the house now," and before she could speak he was gone.

“It was of no use trying to keep him when his mind was set on going,” she said to her daughter Clara, who entered the room just as the door closed after her father.

“Never mind, mother,” said Clara, “I hope he will see enough of their queer movements and hear enough of their foreign language, which they are afraid somebody will understand, to disgust him so he won’t go again.”

“Mr. Gibson says they preach in English,” said Mrs. Carson.

“Well, maybe they do here,” her daughter answered, “but they don’t where I live, for I went to the Catholic church there one Sunday afternoon expecting to hear a sermon, but they only sang in their foreign language and I could not understand a word of it. I saw no sense to what they did and will never go again. I do not think father will either, after he sees it once.”

“Let us hope not,” said her mother.

Could they have seen him as he gazed around the church, when he entered it, with a look of curiosity mingled with a little admiration they might have thought different. How strange every thing looked to him, but although he had spent his whole life working on the farm, he admired beautiful things in art and could not help contrast-

ing the handsome altar, the statues and pictures with the bare walls of his own church. "I do not see how anyone can help feeling better when they are in church to have such things as those to look at," he thought. Just then the sound of the organ was heard and a half a dozen scarlet robed boys appeared on the altar followed by a tall and handsome young priest. Mr. Carson recognized him at a glance as the gentleman he had met a few days before. He was somewhat surprised to find that instead of wearing the plain black suit he had always seen in the pulpit or even the simple robe he had expected to see, he was robed in violet vestments. "How strange," he thought.

It was the first Sunday of Advent and the priest, whose name was Father Bristol, after reading the epistle and Gospel preached a very touching and eloquent sermon taking his text from the Gospel of the day which describes what shall precede the end of the world. He also reminded the people of the holy season of penance upon which they were entering to-day as a preparation for the great and joyous feast of Christmas. The sermon was short, but each word seemed to come from the heart of the preacher and it was not without an effect upon at least one person. The heart of the

rough farmer who never cared for any religion was touched more than it had ever been before and he almost admired the queer movements and singing in a foreign language which his daughter had said would disgust him. He told Mr. Gibson that he had never heard a better sermon and that the Catholic Church did not seem as bad as he had so often heard it was.

“We are very sadly misrepresented by our enemies,” said Mr. Gibson, “but if they would only listen to the truth they would know that we are right.”

On reaching home Mr. Carson found that his family had just returned from their own church. He told them that he had never heard a better sermon and that he intended to go again. He even asked his wife to go with him as he knew that she would enjoy the preaching. Her answer was that she was satisfied with her own church and did not care to go where they worshiped images, prayed to Mary and the saints instead of God and were guilty of numberless other superstitions which outsiders knew nothing about. Clara said nothing although she was very much disappointed to think that her father, whom she thought had a great deal of common sense, should be so taken up with a Roman priest just because he used such

fine language.

Mr. Carson did not care for what any of his family said, and Christmas morning found him at Mass for the second time with the Gibson family. After this he often went alone, and each time he was more interested in what he saw and heard, although there were so many things that he could not understand. "If I only knew what all these strange words and signs meant," he would often say to himself; but he would not even ask his most intimate Catholic friend to explain them, and never thought of seeking information from any books. He felt that there was some sacred mysteries connected with them, for the people seemed so devout while in church. If he ever joined any church it would be the Catholic, and then he would learn what everything he had ever seen meant; but until then he would not trouble himself about them. That time would probably never be, for he still felt a man who professed no religion, and tried to do right could be as good as any devout church member.

During this time ever watchful eyes were upon him. The Gibson family noticed how attentive he was while in church, and how, after a while, he no longer kept his seat through the Mass, but stood and even knelt when the others did. They had

some hopes that he might some day be one of their number. His own family, who only saw his frequent attendance at a church where they said he had no right to go, thought the same, and all of them, especially his wife, who had heard and read so many of the false and groundless stories which unhappily have been circulated about the holy Catholic religion, was very much grieved to see him leaving his own church to go there. She rather indignantly asked him when he returned from Mass one Sunday if he intended to be a Catholic as well as his foolish son, who was still keeping company with that Catholic girl in Buffalo. He answered her truthfully when he told her that he had not thought of this, as he had never joined any church and never intended to.

“Then why do you go there so often?” she asked.

“Because I like to hear Father Bristol preach,” was the reply, and as long as I do not interfere with you or the children, you should not find any fault with me.”

“But you do interfere with the children,” said his wife.

“How so?” he asked, “I was not aware of it.”

“By giving them bad example,” answered

Mrs. Carson. "If they see their father so careless they will think they can do as he does."

"Don't worry about them," said her husband, "for they have a good mother who will teach them to do right, and you may be sure that they will follow her example rather than mine. There was no sarcasm in his voice as he said this, but a firmness which told he would have his own way about going to the Catholic church, and she, seeing that her arguments were of no avail, said no more, but left him to follow his own inclinations. He continued as before, going sometimes to the Catholic church and sometimes with his own family.

CHAPTER II.

One afternoon nearly two years later, Mr. Carson had been to town, and on his way home stopped at Mr. Gibson's to enquire for his oldest son, Willie, who had been very ill for some time, and whom the physicians had given up. He did not notice the carriage that drove up behind him until entering the house he saw Father Bristol coming up the walk. It was the first time he had met the priest, and as Mrs. Gibson introduced him, Mr. Carson noticed that at the mention of his own name he gave a little start as of surprise, repeated the name to make sure that he understood it right, and fixed his eyes on his face for a moment as if trying to recall a likeness to some one he had seen before. But his services were needed in the sick room, so he had no time to think of anything else now, and when he came out Mr. Carson was gone.

Mrs. Carson had expected a letter from Clara, and was impatiently awaiting her husband's return from town. When he came in he handed her the letter, which told her that their daughter was coming home to spend Thanksgiving, and there was

another letter from Charlie saying that he would be there.

“I am so glad they are both coming,” said Mrs. Carson, “for it seems so much like old times to have them here. By the way, I saw you coming out of Mr. Gibson’s, and almost forgot to ask how Willie is to-day.”

“He is very low,” was the reply, “and can hardly live through the night.”

“Poor Mrs. Gibson,” said his wife, “I feel so sorry for her, for she always thought so much of that boy, and it will be too bad if she loses him.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Carson, “she seemed to feel very badly.”

I saw a carriage at the gate,” said Mrs. Carson. “Is the doctor there now?”

“No,” answered her husband, “It is Father Bristol, their priest.”

“Oh,” said Mrs. Carson significantly.

Her husband did not notice this, but went on, “you know, Martha, I always said that “Father Bristol looked like some one I knew. This is the first time I have ever been near enough to him to tell who it was, but it is strange that I could not see it before, for he resembles our son Charlie very closely, and he has Charlie’s voice, too.”

“Oh pshaw,” said his wife, “I did not think you had lost your mind enough to imagine that priest looked like your favorite son,” and Mrs. Carson went into the other room, leaving him in the kitchen to think over the mistake he had made by telling her this.

Half an hour later Mr. Carson heard the front door open and his wife returned, telling him there was some one in the parlor to see him. He saw at once by the tone of her voice that she was displeased, and without saying a word to her he went to see who the guest was.

“What is it, mother?” asked Grace, who was in the room

“The Catholic priest has come to see your father,” was the reply. “He had just been calling on Willie Gibson, and met your father there, and I suppose he thought he was a Catholic, after seeing him at his church so often.”

“It is too bad,” said Grace, “Father shouldn’t have gone there so much, but of course he will tell him that he is not a Catholic.”

“I hope so,” said Mrs. Carson, “but your father seems to think a great deal of him and you don’t know what may come of it yet. And, oh! Grace, what if he should persuade him to join the Catholic Church?”

“I do not think he or anyone else could ever do that, mother,” said Grace, “so do not let us worry about it.”

“I hope not,” said Mrs. Carson, and something said in the parlor caused her to listen for a moment and turn pale, while her daughter looked at her in astonishment.

Leaving the room of the invalid, Willie Gibson, after he had done all he could for him, Father Bristol had sought his father and asked him who the gentleman was whom he had met when he came in.

“Mr. Carson,” said Mr. Gibson, “he is a neighbor of ours.”

“Carson,” repeated the priest, to make sure that he understood the name correctly.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Gibson.

“Did he always live here?” the priest asked.

“He lived where he does now when we came here,” said Mr. Gibson, “and that was about fifteen years ago. I think he had been here about four or five years then.”

“Do you know where he lived before he came here?” was the next question.

“In the northern part of Vermont, somewhere,” answered Mr. Gibson, “but I have forgotten the name of the place. It was quite a

small village."

Father Bristol paused for a moment. He felt certain now that one of the most earnest prayers of his life was to be answered. "Do you know," he asked, "whether Mr. Carson ever lost a son?"

"Yes," Mr. Gibson answered, "I have often heard him speak of a boy who was kidnapped just before they moved here. He was their oldest child and they have never gotten over his loss."

"Then they never found the child?" asked the other.

"No," was the reply, "his parents could find no trace of him, although they searched for him everywhere. Mrs. Carson thinks he must be dead, but his father always said he was sure of finding him sometime, and is still unwilling to give him up."

"Do you know how old the boy was?" asked the priest.

"About six years, I think," answered Mr. Gibson.

"And his name?" asked the other.

"Edward," was the reply, "that is his father's name, too."

"Where did you say Mr. Carson lives?" the priest asked.

"In the next house west of here," was the

the answer.

“I wonder if Father Bristol knows where Ed. Carson's lost son is,” Mr. Gibson thought, as the priest left the house and he watched him until he saw him enter Mr. Carson's yard, then another thought occurred to him. He as well as his neighbor had noticed the striking resemblance between the priest and Charles Carson, and could it be possible that he was the lost son who had been mourned as dead by his mother.

Mr. Gibson was right, for the priest who had just left him was no other than Eddie Carson, and as he walked up the broad path leading to his own father's house he felt like a wanderer returning home after many years of absence. “Could he prove his identity to his parents after being gone so many years, and how would they who were Protestants greet him as he was now? He had indeed found them after a long search, but now even as he stood at their door he was half inclined to turn back. He had often noticed his father at church and, although knowing that he was not a Catholic, he felt that he would receive a warm welcome from him, but his mother, how would it be with her. As she opened the door, although she greeted him with that hospitable welcome which she always had for everyone who came to the farm

house, his keen eye could not help detecting a slight frown behind her courteous smile, and when he asked for Mr. Carson she felt half inclined to tell him that her husband was not at liberty to see him but she would not be guilty of such an act of impoliteness.

Mr. Carson, as might be expected, felt it an honor to receive a call from so distinguished a guest, and he told the priest that, although he was not a member of his church, he was very glad to see him.

Father Bristol seemed puzzled at first as to how to introduce the object of his visit, until, glancing around the parlor, he saw hanging on the wall a life-size picture of himself enlarged from one that had been taken only a few weeks before he had been stolen from his parents. He remembered well the day. It was on his sixth birthday, and his mother having dressed him up in a new suit of clothes, the same man who had stolen him took him to the photograph gallery to have his picture taken, and one of the original tin-types he still had in his possession, so there was no mistake about the identity of it.

With his eyes still fixed upon the portrait, he said, "Mr. Carson, I have come to bring you tidings of that boy whose picture hangs on the

wall."

Mr. Carson looked at the picture, then at him in amazement and said in a voice that in its emotions of joy sounded almost unnatural, "Do you know who that child is?"

"Yes," answered the priest, "it is your oldest son who was stolen from his parents in the little village of M ———, in Vermont, several years ago when he was a small child."

Mr. Carson was surprised beyond expression to learn that this young stranger, who had never been in his house and whom he thought knew nothing of his family, should recognize his son's picture and he did not notice his wife as at that moment she entered the room. The parlor door being ajar, she had heard what was said distinctly and came in to ask an explanation. If the priest only knew where her son was and could restore him to her, she would forgive her husband even for the bad example he had set before the children by going to the Catholic church, and be glad that he had made the priest's acquaintance. "But what if my boy is a Catholic," she thought, "I hope God has saved him from falling into such error, for how could he permit my dear lamb to go astray when I have prayed for him so much? Hardly a night has passed during these last twenty

years that I have not offered up a prayer for the preservation of my dear lost boy."

She was about to speak to the priest when her husband said, "Tell me what tidings you have of my boy, is he living, and if so where is he now? I would willingly give all I possess to find my child."

"He is living and well," answered Father Bristol, "and before you now; I am Edward Carson, your long lost son."

"You!" exclaimed Mr. Carson, advancing toward him and looking in his face, while he grasped his hand firmly, "I am so glad and will be proud to call you my son."

"And, you," said his wife, breaking into tears, "Oh, can it be possible that you are my son? This is more than I can bear, I would rather see you dead than —." In a moment of passionate grief she had given full vent to her feelings but she already regretted having inflicted pain upon the one who claimed to be her son and she checked herself before saying any more. "I shouldn't have spoken so hastily," she thought, "for it is probably not his fault, for I suppose he was brought up that way." Grasping his hand as affectionately as her husband had done she said in a gentle pleading tone: "I hope you will forgive me if my hasty

remark has grieved you, but this was so sudden, so unexpected and you know we are all —.” She paused again, not that she feared to speak the word Protestant, but it occurred to her that her son, Charlie, was still keeping company with a Catholic girl and what if he, too, had gone over to that religion? As she looked at the priest she saw plainly that strong resemblance to Charlie of which her husband had spoken, and she said: “If you are my son, you are indeed a thousand times welcome.”

Grace, who had followed her mother into the room, was so bewildered by what she heard that she was almost unable to speak when her father presented her to the stranger as his sister. She stammered out a word of welcome and tried to appear glad to see her new found brother, but in her sympathy for her mother, whom she knew had spoken the truth when she so hastily said she would rather see him dead, she felt that her welcome had been very cold, and wished that she had not been in the parlor.

As soon as the excitement of the greeting was over, the wanderer was asked to tell where he had been during all those years.

He said that he remembered his old home in Vermont quite well, also his parents, sister and

brother who were both younger than himself. The strange man who had taken him from home seemed more like a member of the family. The man had taken him to the forest, which was then very dense, and they had gone a long distance when he began to grow tired and asked to be taken home. The answer he received was that they were near the edge of the woods and would soon be home. It was nearly dark when they emerged from the forest and found themselves in a large grain field. Here the man hid him and left him for a few minutes, telling that he would whip him if he made any noise or stirred while he was gone. The boy being too terrified to offer any resistance, and almost too tired to stand, sat perfectly still on the ground watching the man as he went out on the road to the nearest farm house to beg some bread for his supper. He begged to be taken home to his mother, as he was sleepy and wanted to go to bed, but the man only told him to keep still and he would take him home. Instead of this, he traveled on through the fields until dark, when he went out on the road. Being too exhausted to walk any farther, the man carried him and he soon fell asleep in his arms. When he awoke it was morning, and he found himself on a train which did not leave until late that night, when

they stopped in some city and went to a hotel for a few days.

While there the man told him that he was his father, and told him that he must call him father. The boy obeyed through fear of punishment, and although he never forgot his own parents, he did not dare to mention their names to anyone or tell that he had been stolen from his home. Leaving the city, the name of which Eddie never learned, they took another long journey on the railroad, which brought them to a small city in Virginia. Here they took up lodgings in a boarding house kept by a German family and the man told the family that he was his own child and the only relative he had in the world. Father Bristol did not tell of the many severe punishments he had received from the man who claimed to be his father, or of the many nights he had cried himself to sleep, thinking of his own parents whose names he dared not mention.

Little over a year later the man died quite suddenly and as he had been poor and unknown, nobody took any interest in the little waif he had left. It was in vain that he told the family he had been left with, that he had been stolen from his parents, and begged them to take him home, for they would not believe his story, nevertheless

they had become greatly attached to him and would have brought him up as their own child but their family was too large and they were poor, so they felt that they could not afford to keep him. They put him in a Catholic boy's orphan asylum and he told his story to the Sisters. They tried to find his home, but as he could not even remember the name of the place where he had lived, their efforts proved fruitless.

When he reached this part of the story, his mother wiped from her eyes the tears which started afresh at the mention of the Catholic orphan asylum. "I knew it was'nt his fault," she said to herself.

He remained at the asylum until he was nine years old, when a wealthy Catholic gentleman from Pennsylvania adopted him to be a companion for his son, a boy a little older than himself. Here he found a very happy and pleasant home and the two boys became as firmly attached to each other as the most affectionate brothers could be. Eddie was treated by everyone as an equal to his adopted brother and had every enjoyment that he could desire. These were indeed the happiest days of his life and though for a time he had little leisure to think of the home of his infancy, the memory of it was never quite ob-

liviated from his mind and he often thought that when he got to be a man he would find that dear old home.

Four years passed, and then the first sorrow he had known in this home came, namely the separation from his brother. The parents had, from the boy's very infancy, noticed in him a vocation for the priesthood, which grew stronger each year, until now having almost reached his fourteenth birthday, they sent him to Baltimore to enter upon his preparatory course of studies. Eddie begged to be allowed to accompany him, but the parents refused, telling that they could not give up both of their boys, and they wished him to fill the place of their own son. When school opened the next year, however, seeing that he was still persistent in his entreaties, and did not seem to care so much to be with his brother as for the state of life he felt he had been called to, they let him go, giving him a parent's blessing.

When he was eighteen, about a week after he had completed his fourth year in school, he found in the attic at his home a box containing the clothes that had been brought with him when he came from the asylum and they had been thrown away as worthless. Among them was the suit he had worn the day he was stolen, the tin-type

of himself from which the picture in his father's parlor had been copied, and a few papers belonging to the man who had left him as an orphan in a strange land. On one of these papers his father's name and address was written. Two days later he started for Vermont, hoping to find his parents, but they had been gone nearly eleven years and no one knew anything of their whereabouts, excepting that they had gone west.

He found several persons in the village who had been intimate acquaintances of his parents who remembered well how he had been taken from home. Among them was an old lady who had taken care of himself and his sister Clara, when they were babies. On the record at the Methodist Church he found the certificate of his parents' marriage, which occurred just twenty years before.

He returned to the seminary with a prayer that he might find his parents some time, and remained there until the winter after his twenty-fourth birthday, when, with his adopted brother, who had been kept back a year on account of poor health, he was ordained. The following summer he was appointed pastor of St. Ambrose Church at T——, where he was now.

The priest had noticed his father with the Gib-

son family the first Sunday that he went to church, and had seen him there on several other occasions, so that he knew him to-day when he met him, but had never heard his name until Mrs. Gibson introduced him. It was the first time he had heard the name of Carson since he had sought his parents in their old home, and his heart thrilled with joy at the mention of it. He had entirely forgotten his father's face, being too young when he had last seen him to remember much about him, and he hardly dared hope that he had indeed found those dear ones until Mr. Gibson proved to him that the man he had just met was his long lost father.

When the story was finished, the parents renewed their words of welcome to their son, telling him how happy they were to see him, and that they hoped they would never be separated from him again. It was quite late now, and as there were duties which he must attend to at his church, he bade them good bye, promising to call again the next day and bring the little suit of clothes which he had so carefully treasured as objects which might help to prove his identity to his parents if he ever found them.

After he was gone, Mr. Carson said, "You know, Martha, how I always told you that our

boy would come home some time, and you see now that I was right. ”

“Yes,” said, Mrs. Carson, “and I am very happy to have seen him once more, but oh, Edward, it does not seem possible that he can be my son, our own darling Eddie. ”

“And don’t you know,” he said, “how just before he came I told you that he resembled our son, Charlie, and you cannot fail to see that resemblance now. ”

“Yes,” she answered, “he does look like Charlie, but it seems so hard to believe it all now, let us not talk of it any more,” and the tears which she had tried to keep back began to flow again. For some time she wept, and even Grace’s soothing words had no effect on her. She hardly knew herself whether her tears were for joy or sorrow, but they seemed mingled with both; with joy because the lost one had been found, and with sorrow because—why was it that she dared not mention the cause of her grief in the presence of her husband. To think that her own child was a minister of that religion which from her childhood she had learned to abhor was almost more than she could bear.

Her husband on the other hand, was elated with joy to know that the priest who preached such

grand sermons and on whom he had long ago learned to look as a model of perfect Christianity, should prove to be his own son. Even now he felt that it was better the boy had been taken from him, for had he been brought up at home as his brothers had, he would probably, like them, never been any more than a common laborer or farmer, while now, besides, being where even, though he was a Catholic, he might do a great deal of good, he had a fine education, which was more in the eyes of this uneducated farmer than anyone would have thought.

The next afternoon Father Bristol brought out each relic that he had saved from his childhood and had them ready to take home to his mother. How he rejoiced in the thought that in performing his duty God had guided him to the door of his own parents. He had celebrated Mass that morning in thanksgiving for that great pleasure, but he would not satisfy himself that his identity had been proved until his mother had seen those things, and he could hardly wait until he would be at leisure to go to her with them. His office must be said before he went, and numberless other duties would occupy his time until afternoon. At length he was ready to go, and was just driving out of the yard, his mind filled with happy thoughts of his

parents, when a messenger came, saying that a man was very ill in a town about twenty miles distant, and as the parish priest was not at home he was requested to go to him.

The day was quite chilly, and had it not been for the disappointment accompanying it, the prospects of such a long drive would not have been at all pleasant, but the zealous young priest thought of nothing but duty which to-day called him outside of his own parish, and turning his horse in an opposite direction from his home, he started on his errand of charity. It was late at night when he returned and the next forenoon, which was Saturday, another sick call a long distance in the country kept him away until late in the afternoon, when he reached home to find other duties awaiting him and to finish his day's work by remaining until a late hour in the confessional. The next morning after saying an early Mass, he went to say another Mass in a parish he had charge of about nine miles away and vespers had to be sung on his return. Monday morning he was called away quite unexpectedly and did not return until Wednesday, so it was a week after his first visit to his parents before he could call on them again.

They had watched for him every day, and were quite disappointed that he did not come. Mr.

Carson said he knew that something must have happened to keep him away, but his mother, who was more sensitive and believed the majority of the Catholics to be very bigoted, ventured to say that perhaps he did not care for them when he found that they were Protestants, and would not call on them again.

Thursday afternoon he came, and when his mother heard why he had remained away so long, she said, "I had no idea that Catholic priests, had so much to do. If you were only in some city church where you would only have a small parish and would not be obliged to go out in the country, how nice it would be. I don't see how you can stand this."

"My work is easy compared with what is to be done in the city churches, mother," he said, "and I should not complain."

"Easy?" repeated his mother, "how can you call it so when you are liable to be called away to visit the sick at any time and you are never sure of a night's rest?"

"We do it for the love of God," was the reply, "and we should thank him for giving us the strength to perform our duty."

"What a true spirit of Christianity," his mother said more to herself than to him, "if we only had

such as he among our ministers, I think there would be more true Christians. ”

There had been a time when her child Eddie was at home with her that she had entertained some hope of his becoming a minister when he grew up, and before he was taken from her she had begun to try to instill in his infant mind a love for religion and a desire to be a preacher, perhaps a missionary to some heathen land. In spite of her bigotry Mrs. Carson was most sincere in her own religious belief and desired to do what was right. She had prayed for her boy, and although she was as yet unable to realize it, God had rewarded her simple earnest prayers by giving the greatest blessing that could ever fall upon any son, namely, the privilege of performing the sacred duties of a Catholic priest, for what man, however holy his life may be, if he is not a priest can perform that sacred and sublime mystery of changing bread and wine to the body and blood of Jesus Christ by using the same words the divine Redeemer used at the last last supper, the night before he suffered to expiate the sins of the world, and which he authorized—yes, commanded his apostles, and their successors as well, to do in commemoration of Him?

The mother was blind to the sacred office her

son held, but he, her boy, for whom she had prayed, also prayed for her, prayed most earnestly that she might learn to know and love her God, not as she worshipped now in darkness, but in the light of the true faith, and that prayer would be answered, for the time was to come when, like another Saul, she would in a moment be converted. But that time was far off, and another than himself was chosen to reap the harvest of the seeds sown by his most earnest prayer.

Carefully Mrs. Carson undid the parcel her son had brought her, as if it contained relics made almost sacred to her by being treasures that had belonged to some dear departed dead, and carefully she examined each little article of clothing which her own fingers had made years ago, when she was a young woman, and which recalled so many memories of those days. If there had been any shadow of a doubt lingering in her mind as to his identity, there was none now, and she saw in him not a leader and strong professor of a religion which she despised, but her own lost boy grown to a man, whom she felt proud to call her son.

CHAPTER III.

THANKSGIVING eve the same family circle that had been here two years ago were assembled around the table, Eddie, the same as on that night, being the only one that was absent, and he might have been here, but Mr. Carson thought it best to wait until to-morrow, when Clara and her two brothers, who were still ignorant of the happy meeting in store for them, would be prepared for it.

Grace had set the table for tea, and after all were seated, Clara, glancing to where the vacant place should have been; said, "Haven't you forgotten something, Grace?"

"What is it, Clara?" asked her sister with a merry twinkle in her eye, for she knew what Clara meant.

"Eddie's plate and chair," was the reply, "You know father always wants them there when we eat our first meal together after being separated for any length of time."

"Never mind about it now," said Mr. Carson, "we can set the table for him to-morrow, and

then"—a look from his wife silenced him, for she had warned him not to tell the good news until after supper, when the family were assembled in the parlor.

Pointing to Clara's oldest boy, who occupied the place next to his grandfather which had been left vacant, she said, "You see, Clara, we have found another Eddie who is like our boy was when he left us, only a few weeks more and he will be the same age, so let him have the place of honor just for to-night," and the last words were said in a lingering tone, "just for to-night."

"How kind of you, mother," said Clara, "and I hope that my little boy will prove to his dear grandma to be all that her own Eddie was, and I wish he could make up to her for his loss." Had Clara spoken these words to her mother at any other time, she would have appreciated them as coming from the kind heart of her favorite daughter, but now it seemed as if Clara, though unconsciously, were trying to lessen her mother's affections for her own son by putting a grandson in his place.

The evening meal was over now, and the family were all in the parlor. Mr. Carson stirred up the coals in the fireplace, added a new supply of fuel, and, lighting his pipe, sat before the fire

for a few minutes watching now the burning coals, then the wreaths of smoke rising from his pipe as if trying to find in them words to express his thoughts.

“Father has something very important to say,” thought Clara, “and I wonder what it can be, and Charlie who had been watching his father, said, “A penny for your thoughts, father, I know it must be something interesting.”

“Yes, it is, Charlie,” he said, “I have some very good news for you, but I hardly know how to tell it.”

“What is it?” asked his son, growing more interested when he saw the happy expression on his father’s face.

“We have found your lost brother, Eddie, at last,” said Mr. Carson, “and he will be here to spend the day with us to-morrow.”

“What?” asked Clara, turning quickly to her father, “found my brother, can it be possible, you do not mean it, father?”

“It is so,” said Mr. Carson, “Eddie has been home and will be here again to-morrow.”

“Where is he now?” asked Charlie, “and where has he been all these years?”

Frank was no less surprised than the others; he arose and stood before his father, but could not

find words to express his astonishment.

Mr. Carson emptied the ashes from his pipe in the fireplace, laid it down and commenced to tell the story. At the mention of his being a Catholic priest, Clara turned pale and interrupted her father, saying, "Oh, father, this is too much, I cannot bear the thought of it. If you had told me my brother was dead, it would not seem so sad. Oh, mother ! oh, Eddie !" and calming herself a little, she continued : " I will try to welcome him as a dear brother, and will never let him know the grief I feel in finding him as he is."

Clara, being the oldest girl, had always been her mother's favorite, and their likes and dislikes had ever been the same, but in nothing did their thoughts find more unity than in their religious belief, so now the words that came from her heart in sympathy for her mother were merely an echo of what she knew her mother's feelings must be. But how differently did Charlie receive the news. He said nothing, but his face told only too plainly that what displeased his sister was more joyful news to him, and he could hardly refrain from saying " I am very happy to know that in my family there is one who will be a friend to me now." Frank, too, was silent, for he had been studying his brother's countenance and thought he

possessed a secret, but he would not betray it.

The next morning Eddie came and was greeted by a most hearty welcome from his two brothers, while Clara gave him a welcome that never could have betrayed the disappointment she felt in finding him so changed. A happier day was never spent at the Carson farm house, for they were all at home now and the vacant chair at the table was filled at last. Eddie proved to be a most cheerful and entertaining guest, rather than the stern puritanical clergyman they had expected to find him, and even Clara, who was more adverse to having anyone belonging to her a Catholic than her mother herself could have been, forgot the presence of the obnoxious Roman collar in the enjoyment of her brother's company. After he was gone she said that she never thought a Catholic priest could be so friendly, for she had always believed them to be cold and distant. Her mother answered her, saying that she thought Eddie must be an exception.

After dinner, when the family were just seated around the fireplace in the parlor for a pleasant conversation, a rap came to the door, and Mrs. Carson on opening found Tommie Gibson there, apparently very much excited. "Is Father Bristol here?" he asked in a tone which told that some-

thing was the matter.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Carson, “he is spending the day with us.”

“Please tell him I would like to see him,” said the boy.

Mrs. Carson called her son and the boy told him his brother Willie was dying and wished to see him.

“I am sorry you must leave us,” said his mother, “when we had anticipated so much pleasure in having you spend the whole day with us.”

“Never mind, mother,” said the priest, “I do not like to disappoint you, but I’d rather go, and perhaps I will not be gone long.”

“I wouldn’t ask you to stay when you can be of any service to that poor boy,” said his mother, “so go now; we can do without your company better than he can.”

“Thank you mother,” he said, “I will try to be back soon.”

All the afternoon they anxiously watched for his return, but he did not come until nearly ten o’clock, when he stopped to bid them good-night and to tell them that William Gibson’s sufferings were over. His death, which had been almost hourly expected for nearly two weeks, had come a few minutes before.

The next afternoon Charlie went to call on his brother and to tell him the secret which ere long he must make known to his parents. Instead of taking his mother's advice and giving up Theresa Kinney, he had pondered more on her words, "you can never live in happiness with one whose religion differs so much from your own," and on his return to the city he had entered upon his instructions in the Catholic faith. It had seemed hard at first to think of embracing a religion so different from the one he had been brought up in, but as he began to understand more clearly the doctrines of Catholicity, he had learned to admire them, and now, after nearly two years, he felt that he was fully prepared for baptism. The priest from whom he had been receiving instructions had told him he was, and he was to have received the Sacrament on his return to the city. As his brother was a priest, he wished to ask the favor of receiving this, his first Sacrament, from him.

Father Bristol questioned him and found him to be well instructed, but would not promise to baptize him until after he had written to the priest from whom he had received his instructions, which he did that night. He received an answer the following Monday, telling him that his brother was most sincere in his intention and thoroughly

understood the nature of the step he was about to take. The priest had looked forward with joy to the time when he should make him a member of the Catholic fold, but now he would give that pleasure to his brother, and he hoped soon to hear that Charles Carson was a Catholic.

Sunday Charlie attended Mass with his father, who could not be prevailed upon to go to any other church now, and little Willie, his youngest brother, who after much coaxing had been permitted by his mother to go to hear his brother preach.

Monday morning William Gibson was buried, and it was to attend his funeral that Mrs Carson first crossed the threshold of the Catholic church accompanied by the whole family excepting Grace, who had remained at home with Clara's children. Charlie acted as one of the bearers and his mother, who sat near him, soon noticed that he was no stranger in the Catholic church, for he stood or knelt when the others did with an ease that showed that he knew what he was doing. "Can it be that he too, is a Catholic," she thought. Her attention was fixed on her other son at the altar and watching him and listening to the sweet, sad strains of music wafted from the choir, she forgot Charlie.

When on her return home her husband asked her how she liked the services, she only answered, "It is a very strange religion," while Clara's answer was that she thought Eddie was a very fine preacher, but oh, what a pity that he should be a Catholic priest when he might be such a good minister.

That night Charlie informed his parents of his intention to become a Catholic. His father told him that as for him he was at liberty to do as he pleased, but to his mother, as might be expected, the disclosure was anything but pleasant. She told him how it grieved her to see him giving up his own religion just to please a girl, and begged of him now before he had taken the final step which would bind him to the Catholic church to be man enough to turn back from the path of error which he was about to enter. "Your brother was brought up to it," she said, "and cannot be blamed so much, but you whom I have brought up myself and taught what was right should know better."

"My brother," said Charlie, "is not as ignorant as you may imagine. He knows that the faith he teaches is truth itself, as do I, and knowing that faith as I do now, I could not with a free conscience remain outside the church even if I had

never known Theresa Kinney or any other Catholic girl. ”

“ Do you mean to tell me, ” said Mrs. Carson, “ that she has not influenced you to take this step? ”

“ I do, ” said her son, “ that is—well, of course, in the beginning when I first commenced to study her religion, I did it to please her and to prove to myself that she was right in her belief. If I had failed in the latter, I would have given her up sooner than become a member of the church, but I am fully convinced that she is right and I shall delay no longer. ”

“ My son, how can you talk in that way? ” asked Mrs. Carson in a grieved tone.

Charlie felt that he had been rather bold in saying this to his mother, who had brought him up so differently, but he only spoke the truth from his heart and he would not relent.

At last his mother said, “ Since you are of age and old enough to know your own mind I suppose there is no use of offering any further objections, although it grieves me very much to see you do this, besides if you insist upon marrying her it will be better for you both to be of one religion. ”

When Charlie came home he had intended re-

maining only a week, but as he would have but little to do if he returned to the city, he decided not to go back until after the Christmas holidays, when he intended to be married. Two weeks from the Sunday after he came home he was baptised by his own brother, Mr. and Mrs. Gibson being his godfather and godmother.

Theresa Kinney was an orphan now, alone in the world with no one excepting her little brother left out of a once large family. Her mother had been dead about a year and a half, and she had promised her on her death bed that she would never marry Charlie Carson until he became a Catholic. She would keep this promise even though she had to spend many lonely hours in the little home, which, for her brother's sake, she would not give up. And lonely hours, indeed, they often were, especially as the Christmas holidays drew near, those days which had always been such happy ones for them while their parents were living. Two years ago they had enjoyed such a pleasant Christmas with their mother, and a year ago they had spent it in the home of an uncle in the country, but mother was gone now and their uncle had moved away to the far west, so they must remain at home alone.

Theresa thought of this a great deal, as the great

holiday drew near and wished that she had some kind friends with whom to spend it, not that she cared for herself, for she would be contented to remain alone, but her little brother, he would be so lonely, as she could not make the day as happy for him as when their dear mother was living. She felt this more keenly when, one day about a week before Christmas, he came home from school and told her the plans the boys had been making that day about how and where they were to spend the holidays.

One boy was to visit his grand parents, another his uncle, a third was to have a big Christmas tree at home with his brothers and sisters, while another expected several of his cousins from the country, "And dear, sister," said the boy, "I couldn't help feeling bad when they asked me how I was agoing to spend Christmas for, I could not tell them I was going anywhere."

"Never mind, dearest brother," said Theresa, trying to choke back her sorrow at seeing her brother so lonely. "We will have a Christmas ourselves and you may invite any boys you wish."

"May I Theresa?" he said eagerly "How kind you are," and he went on telling who he would invite, until Theresa began to wonder if their little rooms would hold so many boys, but

she would not disappoint him by refusing to invite any one that he thought of.

The Christmas tree was all that he talked of during the remainder of the day, but in the morning a letter came which changed his thoughts. He was getting ready to go to school when the letter carrier brought it in. Theresa glanced at the post mark and saw that it was from T——, Charlie Carson's home, but the writing was not his. "I wonder who it can be from?" she thought as she tore it open. To her surprise, she found that it was an invitation from Mrs. Carson for herself and brother to spend the holidays at her home. She said the family would be very happy to have them come and hoped they would not disappoint them.

"How kind of Mrs. Carson to send us the invitation," she said more to herself than to her brother, who with a happy, eager face had been listening to her read the letter, "but of course I shall decline the invitation."

"Won't you go, Theresa?" he asked, the happy expression fading from his face. "Why not?"

"Because," said his sister, "I do not think it would be proper."

"I don't see why not," said the boy, "since Mrs. Carson has been so good as to invite us, and

we would enjoy ourselves so much if we went."

Theresa was silent, for she did not wish to disappoint her brother by refusing to go, neither did she wish to accept this invitation which had probably been sent at Charlie's request.

"You will go won't you, Theresa?" he pleaded, and he was on her knee now looking earnestly into her face, "I want to see Charlie's little brother, Willie, so much, and his pleasant home, which I have so often heard him tell about."

"Wouldn't you rather remain at home and have your Christmas tree?" she asked.

"No," he said, "I want to go to the country, for it will be so nice there and I know you will enjoy it more than staying here and—and having a house full of boys to bother you."

"I will not mind that," said his sister, "if you only enjoy yourself with them."

"But I would enjoy myself more in the country," he said. "Now won't you go? Please write this morning and tell Mrs. Carson you will come."

"I will think about it," said his sister, "but it is time for you to go to school now." Buttoning his coat around his neck and putting on his cap, she kissed him good-bye and stood watching from the window as he hurried off to tell the boys

that he expected to spend the holidays in the country.

After reading Mrs. Carson's letter over several times, trying to consider whether or not to accept the invitation, Theresa sat down to answer it. No more was said about Charlie than about any of the other members of the family and perhaps after all it was not him that caused it to be sent, and here she was right, for Charlie knew nothing about the letter. His parents wishing to give him a surprise, would not let him know it had been sent until she came. Theresa thought how anxious her brother was to go and what a pleasure it would be for him, so now, as was often the case, his will became hers. When he came home from school the letter was written, and with a light heart he went out to mail it.

About an hour before the evening train was due on the twenty-third of December, Mr. Carson drove up to the door with the double sleigh and told Charlie that he wished him to go to the train with him as he expected company from the east.

Charlie looked at his father curiously, and seeing that he was dressed better than he usually was when he went to town, said, "Who is it that you expect, father?"

"A lady," said Mr. Carson, with a laugh.

“And may I ask her name?” said Charlie.

“Never mind about that,” answered his father, “you’ll find out who she is when you see her, and I think you will be glad to see her, too,” he added, with a merry twinkle in his eye.

Charlie took his seat in the sleigh, wondering what new scheme his father had, and why he would not tell him who the expected guest was, but the truth never once entered his mind until he reached the depot. The train had just come when they drove up to the platform, and among the few passengers who alighted he noticed a lady with a little boy. He thought they looked familiar, but as it was quite dark he could not tell who they were. His father saw them, too, and pointing to them as they entered the depot, he said, “I think those are the ones I expected and as I don’t want to get out of the sleigh, I wish you’d go in and tell them I’m waiting.”

Charlie glanced through the window, in front of which they had stopped, and all at once the truth dawned upon him. He did not see Theresa, but her brother was standing by the window, and when he saw Charlie he ran to the door to meet him, saying “Here he is, Theresa.” As soon as Charlie recovered from his surprise, he bade them welcome and led the way out to where his

father was waiting.

“Will wonders ever cease?” he thought, when he learned how his mother had invited Theresa and her brother to spend the holidays with them, and the hearty welcome that they received from the whole family surprised him little less. To think that his mother had so strongly objected to having him even go with this girl, and now for her to bring her to her home to make a visit would have been more than he could have believed had he not seen it. Since his brother Edward had been found, a great change seemed to have come over his mother, but still such an act as this on her part was more than he could ever have hoped for.

On Christmas morning one of the happiest events of Charlie's life took place, and it was a day never to be forgotten by the young neophyte, for it was then that in company with his intended bride he approached the holy table for the first time to receive his blessed Redeemer under the sacramental veil of the blessed Eucharist.

Theresa's gentle winning ways soon won the affection of the whole family, and Mrs. Carson herself said that she did not think Charlie could have chosen one who would make him a better wife, while her little brother Francis was a no less welcome guest. Mr. and Mrs. Carson had a plan

which they hoped would be carried out in case they liked her, but they were a little disappointed here. They had intended to give them a grand wedding just after the holidays, but Theresa would not consent to to be married in any other church than the one which she had attended since she was child; and where the funerals of her parents had taken place. The week of her visit passed too quickly for the Carson family, for they all regretted her departure, and as they bade her good-bye Mrs Carson whispered to her that she hoped that it would not be long ere she might have the pleasure of calling her daughter.

Mrs. Carson soon had her desire gratified, for about four weeks later the wedding took place in Buffalo. They were married at a high Mass by Father Bristol, Charlie's brother, who had come to perform the ceremony ; his brother Frank acted as groomsman and Grace as bridesmaid. None of the other members of the family were present. A quiet wedding breakfast was served at Theresa's home after Mass, and the little company of six took a noon train for T——, where, at the Carson farm house, a grand feast was awaiting them, and many of the most intimate friends of the family were ready to give them a welcome and to shower upon them their best wishes for a long and happy mar-

ried life. Never were Mr. and Mrs Carson more proud than when they introduced their new daughter-in-law to their friends.

The next morning the happy pair started on their wedding trip to Michigan, where they were to spend a few days with Clara, who had sent them a most pressing invitation to make her a visit. Theresa had never before been separated from her brother, but she left him with Mrs. Carson until their return, and in doing so she felt that he was in good hands, while he felt perfectly at home at the farm house. On their return they went to Buffalo, where they made their home in a neat little cottage located in a more pleasant part of the city than where Theresa's old home had been.

CHAPTER IV.

AS the weeks and months passed and the Carson family grew better acquainted with the new-found brother, they all became greatly attached to him, and many pleasant hours were spent in his company. His father grew prouder of him each day and never seemed happier than when he heard some of the parishioners tell of his kindness to them, and especially to the poor; or when, from a front seat which had been reserved for him in the church, he watched his son at the altar and listened to his sermons and instructions, for he attended the church now much oftener than before, but it was alone that he came, for his wife would never, excepting on some great occasion, accompany him, and she did not want the children to get in the habit of going to a church that was not their own. The thought of becoming a Catholic, however, was as far from his mind now as on the day some months before the discovery of their son when his wife had asked him if he intended to join that church.

The mother, too, could not help feeling proud of her boy, but she would never admit it to any-

one. If it were a Catholic friend she heard speak his praises, she would often try to appear as indifferent as any mother could when her son's name was mentioned, and would change the subject, while to some of her most intimate Protestant friends she would say, "What a pity it is that Eddie could not have been a minister, when he preaches so nice and might have done so much good in our church, besides, how much better it would be if he had a wife to help him, instead of living alone all his life with no one to take any interest in him." But Mrs. Carson called on her son very often, and she was quite surprised that he never mentioned her religion to her. This was one reason why she allowed the children to call on him whenever they wished, for she said she knew he had more sense than to interfere with what she had taught them.

While the mother and children thought only of the pleasure of the priests company, the father's curiosity drew him almost unconsciously into far deeper channels. He wanted to know the meaning of some of those ceremonies, which from the first time he set foot inside the Catholic church had puzzled him so much, and when no one was present to hear him and twit him afterward of being interested too much in things that ought

not to concern him, he questioned his son about them. Contrary to that oft repeated accusation of being afraid to tell anyone all that was done in the churches, which is laid to Catholics, he received explanations in simple words that the most ignorant could not fail to understand, and yet with a fullness that might have satisfied the learned.

Some times he would bring with him a small Bible, which he could carry in his pocket, so that he could take it from the house without having it noticed, and talk over passages which had puzzled him most when reading them for his family, as his wife had always insisted upon his doing every Sunday afternoon or evening. For an hour or two, and sometimes three, he would listen to his son talk or read from some book in which he was interested, and while he realized it not, he was fast becoming a Catholic in his belief.

This had gone on for many months, and one day after he had been listening with more than usual interest to an explanation of a passage from the Bible, over which his wife and himself had many arguments, and which one understood no better than the other, for it was one of the proofs of a Catholic doctrine which they did not care to admit was true, Mr. Carson said while the tears

almost glistened in his eyes: "How grand your religion is and how happy you must be to be a member of such a church."

"We Catholics are indeed happy," answered the priest.

"The life of a Catholic always seemed hard to me," said his father, but it don't any more, and if"—he paused.

"What is it father?" asked the other.

"I was going to say if I wasn't so old I believe I would join your church myself."

"Too old father?" said the priest reproachfully.

"Yes," said Mr. Carson, "I never joined any church, although your mother used to beg me to, but it is too late for a man of my age to think of it now. I have always tried to do right by everybody, and I think I will be saved just as much as some of our strictest church members who call themselves Christians."

Father Bristol shook his head. "Father," he said, in a tender voice, "it is never too late to think of the salvation of your soul; old age is the time when we should give our whole hearts to God if we never have before, for then the time that we must meet Him is near at hand, and He alone can help us in that hour when the world is ebbing away. It is not for life that we belong to

the church and live up to its rules, but as a preparation for death. What better preparation could we make than to follow the rules which Jesus Christ has given us in His church? We have no right to make rules for ourselves and disrespect the ones He has laid down for us, for is He not wiser than we and did He not know what was best for us when He gave them?"

Mr. Carson was silent for some time, for the words of his son had sunk deep into his heart and a new light had crossed his path. At last he said, "My son you have convinced me and I will join your church. I am ready now to be baptized."

"Not yet, father," said the other, "for you do not understand the Catholic religion and you must know it and believe in it before you can embrace it."

"I do believe in it now," said his father, "and as for knowing it, what more is there for me to learn? Haven't you answered every question I have asked you and explained many other things besides?"

"Yes" answered his son, "but there is still much more for you to learn before I can receive you into the church."

"I am satisfied with what you have already told me," said Mr. Carson, "and I ask to know

no more, for I am certain that there could not be anything in your religion that I would ever object to if I knew it a thousands times better."

"It is not that I think that in knowing more about the Catholic religion than you do there would be any possibility of your changing your mind," said the priest, "on the contrary, the more you know of it the more you will admire it."

"If that be the case," said Mr. Carson, "why not be received into the church now and learn more about it afterwards? Would not that do just as well?"

The priest shook his head, "Would you wish," he said, "to take such a step as this—a step upon which the eternal salvation of your soul depends—without first knowing and considering well what you are doing?"

"No," said Mr. Carson after some reflection, "but I can never change my mind, it matters not how long I may think of it. What a difference between you and the Protestant ministers I have known! They are ready to receive anyone who wishes to join their church at any time when they find that they are sincere in their intentions and with hardly any preparations, while you require so much of a convert."

"We require no more than is necessary for

them to know in order to become good and faithful Catholics," answered his son, "and we do not want to bring anyone into our church in ignorance of what it teaches."

Mr. Carson was silent for a few minutes, then said, "Teach me my son, teach me all that I should know in order to become a good and sincere member of your church. I am willing to wait any length of time if I can only die a Catholic, for I feel that none but the true church of Christ could use such caution in admitting strangers into its communion."

"The sacraments intrusted to our care are too sacred," said the priest, "to be given indiscriminately to those who know not the greatness of them."

"I think you are right, my son," said Mr. Carson, "in being so cautious, and I feel more than ever that yours is indeed a sacred office. I can never tell you what a happiness it is to me, your father, and not yet a member of your church, to have you where you are, and I am happy to know that my son, Charlie, is one of your number. How I wish that his brothers and sisters might follow his example, but I suppose they never will."

"Do not worry about them, father," said the

other, "we can only pray for them and God in His infinite goodness and wisdom, will yet bring all things right."

"I will trust in Him," said his father, "and will not cease to pray for my wife and children."

It was in early autumn that the foregoing conversation took place and the following Holy Saturday after the Batismal waters had been blessed, the head of him who had often declared that he would never join any church was bowed to receive that regenerating stream, which he accepted with the pure faith and simplicity of a child. Although age had already begun to show itself on him in more than one way, he had the alertness of youth this morning, and had never seemed any happier. He had arisen long before any of the rest of the family to get ready to go to Mass, which was at an early hour, and he was the first one in church. It was with the greatest pride he walked up the aisle and stood before a large number of his friends, some of whom were Protestants, to receive the sacrament of Baptism, and all the rest of the day he was as light-hearted as a child. His son, had from the very first, found him to be a most apt scholar in the truths which he taught him and Mr. Carson promised to be a most sincere and devout convert.

Mrs. Carson had, as might be expected, strongly rebelled when her husband first told her of his intentions to become a Catholic, but afterwards, when she saw that he was determined, she let him have his own way without further comment, but not until after she had given him a good sensible talking to about setting such a bad example before the children; first, by being so careless all his life and refusing to join the church she was bringing them up in, and, second, by joining another church in his old age. On the morning he was baptized she would not go to see him, but she allowed the children to go and everyone who was at home went, some of them more out of idle curiosity than for any other motive but they were all deeply impressed with the depth of their father's devotion, which was so much greater than what he had ever shown in his own church, but most of them soon forgot it after leaving the church and going home to their mother, who was extremely sad to-day and would not be comforted.

Father Bristol realized it not, but in his family he had another admirer, who ever watched him with more jealous eyes than his father; it was with the eyes of a child, who, in an older brother, had found an ideal of perfection whom he wished to copy. It was his youngest brother, Daniel, the

baby of the family, who was never so happy as when he was with "Father Eddie," as he called him.

Dan was as unlike the others, as day is unlike night. He cared little for their sports, but would spend hours at a time among his books, and might often be found with book in hand studying or reading in the hay loft or hidden under the shade of some large tree in the pasture. In his classes he was always at the head and many times his teachers prophesied that with the chance of an education he would make a very learned man. His father listened to this with pride and often declared that Dan should have a good education if he had to mortgage the farm to pay for it.

Dan loved to roam alone in the fields and forests and study the beauties of nature, but what he enjoyed most of all was to visit his brother, Edward, and listen to him talk or spend a few hours in a well-filled library which was kept for the children of the parish. Dan was delighted with this at first but soon he began to grow interested in another larger book-case, which stood in the same room, and his busy brain would not rest until he had investigated the contents of its shelves. From the children's story books he had been reading, he turned first to the lives of a few

of the saints in the "Young Folks Library," then to more complete editions of the same which he found among the larger works, not only these but controversial works fell into the hands of the youthful student and he read with great interest, while many things in them were far beyond his comprehension.

One afternoon on his return from a sick call, which had kept him away nearly half the day, Father Bristol returned home to find his little brother in the library, where he had left him. "Well, Dan," he said, "you here yet, you haven't been reading the all time while I was away, I hope?"

"Not quite," was the reply, "I took about half an hour for dinner and was out in the garden for a few minutes, but I enjoyed myself more here, so I came back."

"I think you have read enough for to-day," said the priest, "but let me see what you have there." He put out his hand and the boy gave him a small Latin grammar. "I suppose you have your lesson all learned for to day," he said, when he saw what it was?

"Yes, Father," said Dan, "I learned it this morning before I came, and I have just been reviewing some of the back lessons to see if I had

forgotten them."

"Come out on the lawn," said his brother, "for it is pleasanter there than here and I will hear you recite your lesson, then we will go for a walk, or I will drive home with you."

Dan had learned nearly everything that was to be learned in the country district school he attended, and as he wanted to know something of the languages before he went away to school, he had commenced the study of Latin about six months before. He was only a little over thirteen now, but he had a wonderful memory and learned as easily as a much older and more experienced student in languages. To-day he had his lesson perfectly, but his brother could not help noticing that his mind was on something else.

The lesson over, Father Bristol said, "Now, my little brother, which will we take, a walk or a drive?"

"I would like to walk home," said Dan, "if you are not too tired after your long drive."

"I am not tired," answered his brother, "and if you prefer walking, I will go over with you, as I have nothing more to do to-day."

During the first part of the two-mile walk Dan said very little, and his brother knowing that something must be on his mind, did not try to draw him

into a conversation, but was almost as disinclined to talk as himself. He felt that the boy who for some time had shared all of his childish joys and sorrows with him, as with an older brother who was ever ready to listen and sympathize, was keeping something from him which he was half afraid to mention.

At last he said, playfully, "What makes you so quiet to-day, my little brother. I hope you haven't been studying so much that you are too tired to talk?"

"No," said the boy, "not quite that, but I have been thinking a good deal lately about what I would like to be when I become a man, and to-day while you were gone I just found out."

"What is it?" asked the priest, but he was not prepared for the answer he was to receive.

"A Jesuit," answered Dan.

"A what?" asked his brother, to make sure that he understood aright.

"A Jesuit priest," was the frank reply.

"Who told you about the Jesuits?" the priest asked in amazement.

"I have read about them in some of the books in your library," answered Dan, "and I think they must be very good men. How I would like to be one of them."

“And what led you to read so much about them?” asked his brother, who was almost as much surprised by the last answer as by the first.

“I read in the “Life of St. Aloysius Gonzaga” how he went to the Jesuit College at Rome to be a priest, and I was so interested in him that I read another larger history of his life that I found in your private library. Having finished that, I have been reading about the Jesuit order to-day. If I could only go to Rome and live as he did, how happy I would be.”

The priest was silent, for he knew not how to answer the child, and the earnestness of his tone told that this new idea was one that he would not give up easily, although he believed that it was only a childish whim. If his brother had been born a Catholic and been brought up in that religion he might have seen in him the first signs of a vocation for the priesthood, but as it was, a child of a Protestant mother, and a father only lately converted to Catholicity, yes, and one whose only religion had been taught him in a Protestant Sunday School, why should he, when so young, think of devoting his life to the Catholic priesthood?

Dan, noticing his brother's silence, turned to him and said, “I hope I haven't done any wrong by reading those books; I thought there was

nothing in the library that you would object to my reading or I wouldn't have touched them. "

"Oh, no, I don't know that there is any harm done," answered his brother. "The Life of St. Aloysius is indeed very beautiful and interesting, and anyone who reads of this angelic youth cannot help admiring him. "

"That is why I want to be a Jesuit," said the boy," because I would like to be as near like him as I can. "

"You can try to imitate his virtues and remain where you are," said the priest

"I will try to imitate him as much as I can," said the boy, "but I want to be a Jesuit too."

"Don't you think your are rather young to think of such a thing?" asked his brother.

"I am over thirteen," said Dan, "almost as old as you were when you thought of becoming a priest, and why shouldn't I be thinking of it too?"

Dan's eager eyes were fixed on his brother, who did not wish to wound his feelings by saying what was in his mind, "Because you were not brought up a Catholic." He only answered, "Let us not talk of it any more now, wait till you are a little older and you will understand better then what you would like to do."

Dan was silent at his brother's bidding, and al-

though his mind was still on the subject at that present was of more interest to him than anything else, he tried to appear interested in the various topics that were introduced to, divert his thoughts until they reached home. The young would-be Levite could not, however, refrain from asking his brother if he would let him join his church, but this was just as they were entering his father's yard and, fortunately, before he was obliged to answer one of his sisters had joined them and the three walked to the house together.

CHAPTER V.

FATHER BRISTOL discovered ere long that Dan's whim proved to be one that was not to be given up without a struggle. The boy did not mention it to him again for many months, but his actions showed that it was still in his mind and, in more than one act he proved himself to be becoming a most devout client of St. Aloysius, while he was still a regular attendant at a Sunday school where the veneration of saints is condemned. The priest often found new marks in the life of this saint after his little brother had been in the library, and once he took the book away for several days to see if the boy would miss it. Dan was alone in the library that afternoon and his brother watched him from a hiding place in the next room, and saw a cloud of disappointment cover his face when he discovered the absence of his favorite book. He did not ask for it as he half expected he would, but went again the second day to look for it, and thinking that it might be lent, waited for it to be returned.

An other act of the boy which attracted his brother's notice, was that he would often steal

away to the church and with all the devotion of a Catholic, who strongly believed in the divine presence, he would kneel for awhile in front of the altar in silent prayer, and always showed the greatest reverence whenever he entered the church at any other time. He never seemed so happy as when allowed to accompany his father on holy days, when his mother permitted him to go, because there were no services at his own church which he would miss, but on Sundays he never dared ask her permission to go.

A few weeks after the "Life of St. Aloysius" had been returned to its former place, Father Bristol imposed another trial upon his brother, by closing him the library and forbidding him to touch any of the books for two months, and also asked him to discontinue his study of Latin during that time, saying that he needed rest. Dan gave up the last, though, rather reluctantly, but he begged to be allowed to take his book home.

"Your book," said his brother, when he heard this request, "what book do you mean?"

"The 'Life of St. Aloysius,' " was the reply. "I am so interested in it that I cannot give it up so long."

"Haven't you read it through yet?" asked the priest, "I thought you had finished it some time

ago. ”

“I have read it through several times,” answered the boy, “and I am so interested in it that I read it and also the little Manual of St. Aloysius, which you gave me, every day.”

“Can you not deny yourself the pleasure of reading the book for a short time?” asked his brother.

“If I give up reading it,” said the boy, “I am afraid I might lose some of my devotion toward my dear patron saint, and it will be harder to imitate him. ”

“You can continue to imitate him just the same,” said his brother, “and think of what you have read, but you must give up that book as well as the others. ” Although he had never before heard his brother mention patron saints, he appeared not to heed the mention of that term, which he used with the familiarity of one who had always known the meaning of it, for a careful study of the child's nature had long ere this revealed to the priest that his brother had a wonderful memory, and was one of the most studious of children. Dan's life was one of deep and continual study, but he seldom mentioned his thoughts to any one, not even his oldest brother, who was his greatest friend and confident, unless

some question of his should draw them forth, and then he would speak whatever was in his mind with a simplicity and confidence of an infant who looked upon him only as a dear brother.

After a little hesitation Dan said, "It will be very hard for me to give up everything that I have taken so much pleasure in. I don't know how I can live two long months without my books, I shall be so lonely."

"You need rest my little brother," said Father Bristol, "you have been studying too hard, and must take it for a while."

"What studying I do does not harm me," answered Dan, "and if it is too much for me to spend only a short time in study each day as I do now, what shall I do when I go away to school?"

"You will be older and stronger then," said his brother, "but if I should ask you to do this as a sacrifice, would you still refuse?"

"It would certainly be a great sacrifice for me to give up all of my books, when I am so anxious to learn, but if you wish me to do it as such, I will try to do without them for a while," said Dan with tearful eyes.

Although deprived of his books, the studious boy found it even harder than he had anticipated to give up his study altogether. Many times

while working in the fields that summer, where he made himself a most useful helper, he might be overheard reciting something he had learned in school or talking Latin, while on the barn doors or on the bare walls of the shed were written Latin words and phrases. When he visited his brother, which was very seldom now, being deprived of the use the library, he oftener went to the church to pray and spent more time there than before.

Strange to say, the young client of St. Aloysius, while he was a sincere Catholic in all of his actions, never—from the day that he expressed his desire to become a Jesuit until two years later, when he was a little over fifteen—never by word showed any inclination to be a member of the faith his holy patron professed, but when he did make it known it was with a determination that his wishes should be carried out at once. He told his brother first of his intention, then his father, and asked them both to pray for him that his mother might not refuse her consent. Mrs. Carson only tried to persuade him to give up such a foolish idea then when she saw that he was determined she gave her consent, saying that she was sorry her baby should leave his own church in which she had tried to give him a good Chris-

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tian bringing up, while to her friends she said that she had been expecting it for a long time and could not think of trying to prevent it.

But little remained to be done in preparing the young convert for Baptism, for after careful study he understood well the nature of the step he was taking before mentioning his intention to anyone. He might have been received into the church early in the spring, but he preferred waiting until the feast of St. Aloysius.

The morning of the twenty-first of June dawned clear and bright and Dan arose with the sun. It was nearly three hours yet before Mass, but there was so much to be done, so much to think of; for to-day was the feast of his patron saint, the day on which he had chosen to embrace the Catholic faith, and his only thought was of the great sacrament he was to receive and of the happiness of having found the true faith.

At half-past seven Father Bristol celebrated high Mass in honor of the patron saint of youth, after which Dan was baptized and he took the name of Aloysius. When it was over his brother said to him: "You appear to be very happy, dearest brother, are you contented now?"

"This is indeed the happiest day of my life," was the reply, "but I shall not be contented un-

til—" he paused.

"Until when?" asked Father Bristol.

"Until I am where you are," said Dan, "I have never for a moment given up the idea of becoming a priest since the day I first mentioned it to you and I hope that I shall soon be allowed to commence my studies."

It was the first time in over two years that Dan had spoken of his choice of a state of life and he laid his plans most earnestly before his brother, asking him to pray for him and to try to help him in gaining the consent of his mother, who, he was certain, would not give him up as easily for the priesthood as she had to become a Catholic.

About this time another member of the Carson family became a convert to the Catholic faith. It was none other than Grace, the girl who next to Clara had showed most sympathy for her mother when her brother was found to be a priest. When she was seventeen she had been sent to a convent in New York to be educated and to have her voice trained by a noted teacher. Being in constant companionship with the sisters and Catholic girls, she soon began to admire their faith and wished to be one of them. She remained at the convent three years and just before she graduated this summer she was baptized and came home a happy

member of the Catholic faith.

Grace's voice had been greatly improved and when she sang at high Mass the Sunday after she came home, those who listened to her said that they had never heard a more beautiful voice. She had not finished her music yet, so she returned to the city late in the autumn to study another year, and then she had been promised a high position as teacher of vocal music in a young ladies' seminary in New York. She was also to sing in the choir in one of the largest churches in the city.

But to return to Dan, who is the hero of the last part of the story. Over a year passed after his baptism before he dared ask his mother's permission to carry out the desire of his heart. He had prayed most earnestly that she might not turn a deaf ear to his request, but dreaded to ask her for fear of being refused. He wished to enter the seminary this fall, and, as school was to open in a few weeks, he could not delay much longer. Each Sunday since the day of his first Communion he had approached the holy table, but never had he felt more fervor than on the first anniversary of that great day, and as he left the church after Mass he felt strengthened to let her know his desire. But how would he ask her that question which he knew must in some measure grieve her? This was the

thought that occupied his mind all the way home, but he was resolved not to retire that night until he had spoken to her of it.

In the afternoon, finding her alone in the parlor reading her Bible, he went to her and told her he wished to talk with her. She laid down the book reverently, and turning to him said she was always happy to listen to anything her children wished to tell her.

Dan paused as if afraid to speak, then in a few pleading words told her of his desire to become a priest.

"You become a Catholic priest?" she said in an agonizing tone, "Oh, Dan, my child, how can you think of doing such a dreadful thing? I could not have believed it of you."

"Yes mother," he answered calmly, "I wish to become a priest and I hope you will not object."

"I object," said his mother, "how could I do otherwise?"

He looked at her with a pleading glance but said nothing, and she continued: "My boy, you do not know what you are asking of your mother, you do not realize what a foolish idea you have in your head, else you would give it up."

"I have thought of this for a long time, mother," he said, "and understand well what I

wish to do."

"I fear you have been deluded into this," said Mrs. Carson, "I do not wish to accuse one of my own sons of doing wrong, but I believe that your brother Eddie is the cause of it; he has undoubtedly talked you into it."

"No, mother, do not blame him," said Dan, "Father Edward would never wish anyone to take so important a step if it were not their vocation; on the contrary, he would sooner do all that he could to prevent it, but, mother, I feel myself that I am called to the same state of life which he is leading, and can find happiness nowhere else."

"Do you mean to tell me that Eddie has never spoken to you of this?" asked his mother.

"It was myself that thought of it first, mother," said Dan, "but I have said but little to him about it until quite recently, although the thought has been uppermost in my mind for a long time."

"How long?" asked his mother.

"Over three years," was the reply, "and cannot give it up now."

"So long as that," said his mother, reproachfully, "and you never told me before?"

Dan did not answer, because he did not wish to tell his mother what she already knew, that he

would only have met with an angry disapproval from her, while his strong will would have been unchanged.

“I suppose,” said Mrs. Carson, “that when you did tell your brother of your desire to follow his example by becoming a Romish priest, he left nothing undone to encourage your foolish whim?” There was a touch of little sarcasm in her voice as she spoke, but Dan choked back his anger at hearing his brother thus spoken of by his own mother, and tried to give no heed to her tone.

“On the contrary, mother,” he said calmly, “my brother offered me no encouragement at first, he did not even wish me to speak of it, and for that reason I kept silent for a long time, but but I can do it no longer, for I feel that it is time for me to be preparing for the work which I have chosen for life, and mother I wish to enter upon my studies very soon, but cannot do it without your permission.”

“And that I shall never give,” said his mother firmly.

“Oh, mother ! ” he said, “if you only knew how much my happiness depends upon it.”

“I cannot help it, Dan,” said his mother, “have you no thought of the grief it would cause your mother to see you taking so foolish a step?”

“Mother,” he said “it pains me beyond expression to cause you any grief, but how could you be grieved to see me, your son, spending his life in the service of God in that to which I know He has called me?”

“You are not called upon to make such a sacrifice of your life,” answered his mother, “and I cannot permit you to do it, so the sooner you give it up the better.”

“Sacrifice, mother,” he said, “I see no great sacrifice in following the dictates of my own conscience in choosing the state of life which I know will lead to happiness both in this world and the next.”

“Dan, my boy,” said his mother, “how can you talk thus? You are not old enough to know your own mind. Your father and I have something better in store for you, it was for that I permitted you to become a Catholic, and I hope that you will not disappoint us.”

“Something better,” said her son, “what do you mean, mother, and what could your motive have been for permitting me to become a Catholic?” Dan could never have believed, had he not heard it from his mother’s own lips, that any worldly motive could have prompted her to so easily give her consent to his choosing a religion in which she did not

believe, and now for the first time in his life he felt a shadow of distrust in her which it would have been hard to conquer. It dawned upon him that she was not the sincere Christian she professed to be, else how could she act thus?"

"My motive," said his mother, "I never intended to mention to you, for I had great hopes of seeing it carried out if I said nothing about it, but what you have told me this morning gives me to know that you do not intend it shall."

"Mother," said Dan, "if your wish is a reasonable one and one that I can carry out without interfering with the duty to which I feel my own conscience binds me, I shall try to comply with it."

"My boy," said Mrs. Carson, "you are rather young to be thinking of such things, but if you wish to know what it is I will tell you, and I hope in time you may think better of the foolish choice you have made."

"Yes, tell me, mother," he said, "and I may be able to satisfy your wishes."

"It is this," said Mrs. Carson, "ever since you were children together, both Mr. Gibson and your father have looked forward to the day when you should be old enough to marry Mr. Gibson's daughter, Jessie. She is almost fifteen now, and

it will only be a few years until you are both old enough to be married. We know, Dan, that you have always thought a great deal of her and she does of you, so I am sure you could not fail to be happy together, and there is not a girl I know whom I think would make a better wife than she."

"Did that have anything to do with your permitting me to become a Catholic?" asked Dan.

"Yes," was the reply, "for I knew that Jessie would not wish to give up her religion for you, and I thought if you joined her church it would please her and you would be happier together."

"Oh mother," said Dan, "how could you do such a thing?"

"It was for your happiness, as I have told you before," said his mother, "and I hope you will try to win Jessie for your wife. You could never do better."

"I am very sorry mother, said Dan, "that you have made such plans for me. I have always liked Jessie as a friend, and still think a great deal of her, but I could never think of marrying her."

"There is time enough to think of that," said his mother, "and when you get a little older you may change your mind."

“I shall never change my mind, mother,” said Dan, “all I wish is to become a priest, my happiness depends upon it, and will you not give your consent?”

“Never” said Mrs. Carson, “and do not ask me again.”

With an aching heart Dan left his mother, for he felt that she would never yield to him, and he must wait five long years, until he was of age, before entering upon the studies for which he was now prepared. It was almost time for Vespers now, and putting on his hat, he started down the road toward the village, but Grace called him back. He turned and saw her standing in the front yard with Jessie Gibson.

“We have been waiting for you,” said Grace, “to take us to Vespers. The carriage is ready and waiting at the side door.”

“It is so pleasant that I prefer walking,” said Dan, when he saw his sister’s companion.

“You will be late if you walk,” said his sister, “and you know you must help me sing the Vespers, so you had better come with us, besides father has harnessed one of the colts for us and I do not dare drive it.”

“Isn’t father going?” asked Dan.

“No.” said Grace, “he is not feeling well

this afternoon."

Seeing that there was no means of escape, Dan helped the two girls in the carriage and took his place beside them, wishing for the first time that Jessie Gibson had remained at home. He was much more disappointed in having her with them, when looking back he saw his mother standing in the door, watching them, with a triumphant look, which seemed to say, "I am glad you have to ride with her."

When Grace returned to New York in the fall Dan, who had hoped to accompany her there on his way to Baltimore, where he wished to enter the seminary where his brother had been educated for the priesthood, was very much disappointed to be obliged to remain at home, for his mother was still steadfast in her refusal to allow him to become a priest. For a year she turned a deaf ear to his request, and left nothing undone to bring him in the company of the girl she had chosen for his wife. She often found excuses to send him to Mr. Gibson's on errands, knowing that he would meet Jessie, who being the only girl, was at home most of the time helping her mother, and when Jessie's work was done she gave her a most hearty welcome at the farmhouse, inviting her to come very often. Dan, on the other hand, tried

to avoid her as much as possible. He never went to Mr. Gibson's excepting when sent there by his mother, and he tried to be away from home whenever Jessie was expected. Very soon after he learned of his mother's intentions concerning her, he told her of his inclination to enter the life of a religious, and as she was a very pious girl, he asked her to pray for him, that his mother might not keep him waiting until he became of age. Jessie listened to him with joy, to think that her reserved young friend should confide his secret to her, and promised to do all that she could to help him.

The young man had been loth to speak of his vocation to a girl who was nothing to him, but he felt bound to do it in order to prevent any misunderstanding between them, for he thought of what his mother had said concerning Jessie's parents wishing to see them married, and he feared that they might say something to her about it and lead her to care for him. God rewarded his good will in telling her, and made her the instrument which was to bring his happiness nearer, instead of taking it from him, as he had at first feared she might do.

Jessie prayed most earnestly for her young friend, and as she saw that his mother's interest

in her seemed to grow stronger each day, she resolved to try to intercede for him. She never dreamed of the motive of that interest, and for Dan's sake she did everything she could to please his mother. One day when they were alone she told her that she had heard that he intended to become a priest, and told her, too, how glad she was to know he had such noble thoughts and hoped he would not delay the preparation for his work much longer. Mrs Carson was disappointed, almost angered at this, but her own girls all being gone some time, her young neighbor had found too tender a spot in her heart for her to easily be offended by anything she said or did, and it was Jessie's gentle persuasions that did more for Dan than anything else could have done.

One day in August, as he was passing Mr. Gibson's on his way home from town, Dan was met at the gate by his friend, who said that she had been waiting for him to come home so as to tell him the good news she had. "But you must never let on that I have said a word to you about it, she said."

"What is it, Jessie?" he asked.

Jessie lowered her voice about to a whisper and told him that she had called on his mother that

afternoon. She had been talking to her about his education, "and, Dan," she said, "I think if you would ask mother now she would not refuse to let you go to the seminary."

"Why do you think so, Jesssie?" he asked, "did she tell you so?"

"No," said Jessie, "she did not tell me so, but I have talked to her about it so often that she really seemed interested in it, and to-day she said if she thought it was for your welfare and you could make as smart a man as your brother, Father Bristol, she would be glad to see you a priest. The way she spoke, I am certain she meant it."

Dan knew his mother too well to think there could be anything in what his friend told him, but to-morrow he would speak to her about it and find out if she had changed her mind. Thanking Jessie for her interest in him, he bade her good afternoon and walked home.

The next afternoon Dan was with his mother again asking her that oft-repeated question and hoping that Jessie's prophecy would come true. At first she tried to change the subject as she often did, then argued with him and told him of the foolishness of his choice. Dan said little, but was steadfast, and at length his mother said, "My son, your

choice has caused a deep wound in your mother's heart, but if you feel that God has called you to devote your life to His service in the Catholic priesthood, go and may His blessing be always with you "

Dan could scarcely believe his ears, and he dared not trust himself to say very much or to remain with his mother longer, for fear that she might take back what she had said. "Thank you, mother," was all he trusted himself to say, and he hastened away to the village, going first to the church to offer a prayer of thanksgiving, then to his brother's house to tell him the joyful news.

The first of September our young friend bade good-bye to his home and friends, and accompanied by his brother, Edward, started for Baltimore, where in a few days his studies were to commence. His father was very proud when he bade him good-bye and wished him the greatest success in his undertaking ; his brothers and sisters regretted to see him go so far from home, but none excepting Clara, who had come home to see him before he went, offered any objections to his choice. She seemed more grieved than even his mother and wept bitterly over him, while his mother, more in sympathy with her than on her own account, broke down entirely and said, "Oh, my baby, I

cannot let you go."

Dan kissed his mother and said, "Do not feel so badly, mother, the day will come when you will be proud and happy to tell your friends that you have two sons who serve God in His holy sanctuary," and with a bright smile, which she never forgot, he bade her farewell.

CHAPTER VI.

EIGHTEEN years of sunshine and sorrow have passed over the Carson farm-house since that Thanksgiving eve when our story opened, and time has made some changes there. The father of the household is now a feeble old man, broken down by age and hard work on the farm, and he seldom crosses the threshold of his home, excepting on some of his best days when he is taken to Mass by his son, Frank, who is the only boy left at home, and who has promised to remain with his father as long as he lives. Frank, like all the rest of the family, excepting his mother and Clara, is a Catholic, and on pleasant Sundays the people of St. Ambrose Church always watched for him to come in with his aged father leaning on his arm. It was sad, too, to see the old man who could no longer read his once-loved prayer-book, sit in his pew saying his beads and trying to follow the Mass said by a priest, whom he saw not, for Mr. Carson had been blind nearly six years. If his eyes were closed to the things of this earth, he bore his affliction bravely, being ever happy, and drawing great consolation from the practice of his

religion, which occupied most of his thoughts.

One great disappointment the Carson family had borne was the removal of Father Edward about eight years before to a parish over thirty miles from home, but he visits them quite often, and they, as well as nearly everyone else in the parish, are greatly attached to an old priest who has taken his place.

Clara is a widow now and has been living at home with her parents and two little daughters for some time. Her husband had died nine years ago after a long illness, during which their home in the west had to be mortgaged to pay the doctor's bill; after his death five of her eight children were taken from her and laid beside their father, then her home was lost, and with her two youngest children she had to go home, while her oldest son, a young man of seventeen, had gone to the far west with hopes of gaining a fortune and making a home for his mother. Success so far has crowned his efforts, and now, after five years spent in hard labor and the strictest economy, he has quite a large sum laid up toward buying the home, where he hopes to make the dear ones so far away as happy as when his father was living, and he has resolved never to marry until he has first done what he calls his duty toward his mother and sis-

ters.

Grace might be called the most fortunate one of the whole family, for her sweet voice has won for her widespread fame, both at home and abroad. After finishing in New York, she taught vocal music for three years then went to France to study under a noted vocalist, remaining there two years after which she made a short tour through the British Isles with a famous opera company, and, returning to New York, started out for herself to win fame by her voice. Her first appearance on the American stage was in one of New York's most fashionable theatres, and the applause she won that night opened to her the road to a successful career. Her brother, Frank, and one of her older sisters, had met her on her arrival in this country, and with them as her only companions she made a tour through the northern and western states which lasted about seven months, then she went home to spend the summer.

During her travels Grace had found many ardent admirers, both in the new world and the old, and she might have become a titled lady abroad, or the bride of an American millionaire, but wherever she went she never forgot Tommie Gibson, to whom she had become engaged the summer after she graduated, and whose manly heart

was worth more to her than all the titles of Europe and all the wealth of Uncle Sam's sons combined. Tommie was a promising young lawyer when Grace came home, having been admitted to the bar little over a year before, and he had come home to practice his profession in his native town.

About three months after Grace's return, they were married, and the wedding was one of the grandest events that had ever taken place in T——; many of Thomas' old schoolmates and Grace's friends from New York were present. A quiet reception was given to a few of the most intimate friends at the farmhouse, and after a short wedding trip, the newly married couple went to an eastern city, where they are now happily living in a very pleasant home. Grace's sister, who accompanied her on her first tour through the country, is living with them and proves herself a most valuable companion, especially during the operatic tours that our friend takes each year and each appearance before the public adds new laurels to the fame of the great singer. Thomas always goes with her, too, and he is very proud of his talented wife. They both find much pleasure in their travels, but what they enjoy most is the pleasant summer spent in their quiet home, and when the husband returns from his law office the

long hours spent in company with Grace and his dear little daughter are the happiest hours of the whole year, and Grace finds them so, too, for home is dearer to her than the public life she leads.

Charlie is still living in Buffalo and is as happy with his wife as on their wedding day. Only one sorrow has crossed their path, and that was the death of Theresa's brother, who had lost his life in a railroad accident when he was eighteen. His body had been brought home, mangled beyond recognition, and his sister has never quite recovered from the blow she received when the sad news came, but is more reconciled when she sees that her only child, a boy who bears his name, grows more like him every day.

The youngest daughter of Mr. Carson became a Catholic about the time that Dan left home to go to the seminary, and little over a year later joined the Sisters of Charity, and we now find her in the ward of one of their hospitals, devoting her life to the service of God and his suffering creatures. All of her good works and prayers are offered up for one great object, the conversion of her mother and sister, Clara.

But let us not forget Dan. Where is he now? The little family circle are in the parlor waiting for the return of Frank, who after his evening's

work was done, had gone to town to get the letter from the absent one that his father said he knew they would receive that day. Soon he was heard driving in the yard and without waiting to put up his horse he went in and gave the letter bearing a foreign postmark to his mother. It was from Dan, who had almost finished his theological studies at the American College in Rome.

After finishing his preparatory course at the seminary, where his brother had been educated, Dan had enjoyed the privilege of being sent to the holy city to complete his education, and on the close of school he had sailed immediately for Europe. He had never been home since the day he bade his parents good-bye, over ten years ago, because he could not trust himself to meet his mother, whom he feared might regret having permitted him to leave her and would try to persuade him not to return to the seminary. The only member of the family he had seen was Grace, who had visited him in Rome before returning to her home, and he but seldom heard from home. The idea of becoming a Jesuit had been given up long ago, for he believed that he could do as much good as an earnest and devout secular priest; but his devotion to St. Aloysius was still as strong as it had been in his youth. He often vis-

and the places that had been hallowed by the presence of this holy youth, and on the first twenty-first of June spent in Rome he enjoyed the pleasure of visiting the dingy little room which he who had been brought up in a princely palace had chosen for his resting place after a day spent in study and works of piety.

In his letter Dan told that he had received the order of deacon, in a few weeks he expected to be ordained priest, and then he was coming home to say his first Mass. In the letter, he enclosed a photograph which had been taken a short time before, and in which he wore his cassock and surplice. His mother said nothing when she saw it, but her face plainly told that she did not like it. When alone with Clara, she said that Dan had grown to be a very fine looking man since he went away, but it almost broke her heart to see his picture taken with those robes on. "It don't look like my baby," she said, "and you don't know how it grieves me to think that it is my own little Dan." With his father it was different; Dan's letter had to be read to him several times, until he had nearly learned the contents of it. He lamented very much that he could not see the picture, and asked numberless questions about how Dan looked, then had the two put away

where he could find them at any time to show to everyone that came in.

It was about the middle of January when young Father Carson came home. Grace and Thomas, who had met him in New York, came with him to be present at his first Mass. On the day that he was expected, his father had insisted upon Frank's going to the station to meet him long before the the train was due, for he feared that he might not get there in time if he did not start early, and before he had been gone hardly long enough to drive to town and back, the old man took his place near the front door to listen for his return, and to be the first one in the house to greet his boy. He knew well the sound of his own sleigh bells, and when after nearly two hours' eager waiting he heard them in the distance, it was with difficulty that Clara could keep him from going out in the deep snow to meet them. The sleigh drove in the yard, and the next minute the young priest alighted from it and met his father in the open door.

"Is this Dan?" asked the old man, as he felt his son's hand grasp his.

"Yes, father, it is I," answered Dan.

"You are welcome home," said Mr. Carson, drawing him into the house, and then laying his

hand on his head he said, "You seem taller than when you went away and those that saw your picture tell me you are greatly changed for the better. If I could only look upon you once more, my dear boy, but I never shall, for you see that I am blind."

Dan looked at his father, and noticed for the first time that there was a vacant stare in the eyes that had been fixed so lovingly upon him as he entered. The family had kept his father's affliction a secret from him while he was away, and had intended telling him before he reached home, but the joy at meeting him had been so great, and they had become so accustomed to the old man's present state that they had entirely forgotten that Dan did not know until now, when his father himself had told him. He looked inquiringly at his sister, who bowed her head, partly in shame, for having neglected to let him know it before and partly in affirmative of what her father had said, and he said, "Never mind, father, you can see me in Heaven and your vision will be brighter there for having lost your sight here."

Dan was, indeed, greatly changed in appearance since he left home, and no one could have believed that this tall, handsome young priest was the same overgrown country lad who ten

years ago had left his father's farm to work in the vineyard of the Lord. He bore a strong resemblance to his oldest brother, and in trying to tell his father how he looked, the most accurate description they could give him, was to tell him that he was just what Eddie had been when he first came to T——. Mr. Carson was satisfied with this, for one of the brightest pictures left in his mind was of how his oldest son looked when he first saw him on the altar eighteen years ago.

Among other callers who came to see Dan as soon as they heard he was home, was Mrs. Gibson and her daughter, Jessie, who was living at home, while the other children were all married and gone, and who had always said she intended to be an old maid, and remain with her parents as long as they lived. Mrs. Carson had never quite given up the idea that her son was the cause of this, and still regretted that the life devoted to the service of God had not been given instead to the young girl, who was as dear to her as one of her own children. Jessie greeted her old friend with a joyful smile, telling him how glad she was that he had become a priest at last, and asking him to give herself and her mother his blessing. Father Carson gave it to both, thanking God that Jessie

had helped to bring him to his present happy state, which, but for her, he might not have enjoyed for four long years yet, and he prayed that God's choicest blessings might be hers for her kindness to him. Even as his hand was raised in benediction over her, he caught a glance from his mother which caused him to shrink from her, but Jessie was too happy to notice it. She had always looked upon Dan Carson with the same interest that she had in her own brothers, and had once hoped to see one of them become a priest, but as neither of them did, she had from the time that Dan first intrusted to her the secret of his vocation, prayed for him as she would one of them and looked forward to his ordination with just as much interest.

On the first Sunday after he came home the young priest celebrated a solemn High Mass for the first time, his brother being deacon and the other Father Bristol, the priest whose father had adopted Father Edward from the orphan asylum, and who had taken a great deal of interest in Dan during the time spent in the preparatory seminary, was sub-deacon.

Mr. Carson had not been able to leave the house for many weeks, and although the day was very cold and stormy, he insisted upon being taken to Mass and occupying the front seat, where he would

be near the altar. His wife was at his side, and while he listened with a sublime joy that made him compare the happiness of this day to the heavenly bliss he soon hoped to enjoy, she sat unmoved. He heard the sweet strains of the organ, mingled with over twenty voices, the sweetest and loudest of which was that of his daughter, Grace, then the voice of his young son fell upon his ears as he said the "Confiteor," and this was enough for him, while she heard the same; beheld the white-robed priests at the altar and saw the happy face of her two sons, her heart was still hardened.

After the reading of the Epistle and Gospel, came the sermon, the text being taken from the gospel of the day :—"But about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing; and he saith to them : Why stand ye here all the day idle? They to him : Because no man hath hired us. He saith to them : Go you also into my vineyard."—(St. Matt. xx, 6-7.) Mrs. Carson gave an involuntary start as she heard the text, but she was soon so deeply interested in the sermon that she forgot all else. Dan had commenced in a mild, gentle tone, but gradually his voice deepened into an outburst of eloquence, and his words were such that he soon held the entire congregation spell-bound. His eloquence was far

greater than his brother's had ever been ; in every sentence he showed a remarkable power of bending at his will the minds of his hearers and he promised to be one of the most eloquent of preachers.

The most attentive listener present was his aged father, who saw in himself the picture of the workman who had been sent to the vineyard of the Lord at the eleventh hour. He thanked God again and again that he had been called, even at that late hour, to work for the salvation of his soul, and the tears falling from his sightless eyes bathed his face with a dew of joy. His wife, too, had been touched, and Father Edward, who glanced at her at the end of the sermon, was the first one to notice the change in her countenance. She kept her seat, watching closely every movement of her son ; her eyes were fixed upon him at the consecration while they were profoundly kneeling with bowed heads, but the sound of the bell on the altar, followed by the stroke of the large one in the tower, caused her to bow her head in reverence. She was impressed by a secret awe, but she knew not why. At the close of Mass, as her son turned to give the last blessing, she fell upon her knees for the first time, with her face raised toward the altar, and at that moment her eyes met his with a glance that told him her heart had been

softened. The two brothers at the altar joined with glad hearts in the "Te Deum" sung by the entire congregation in honor of the occasion.

That afternoon when Dan went home his mother embraced him affectionately, saying, "Do you remember what you said to me when you bade me good-bye as you were leaving home to go to the Seminary?"

"No, mother," said the priest.

"You told me," said his mother, "that the time would come when I would be proud and happy to tell my friends that I had two sons who served God in His holy sanctuary, and my dear son that day has come. I am very proud of you both, and happy, too, because I sincerely believe that in your church is the true way to eternal life. Yours is, indeed, the true faith, and you two chose well when you took upon yourselves to devote your lives to the defence of it, and now all that I ask is that you will receive me into your church, for outside of it I can never again find any happiness."

Father Carson could hardly repress his joy, but he only calmly answered his mother, that she must first be instructed in the teachings of the Catholic faith and then, if she still wished it, she might be received into the church.

"I hope that time is not far off," said his mother, "for I feel that the eleventh hour spoken of in your text to-day has come for me and ere long my life will be over. I want to be prepared to die in the Catholic faith."

"I hope you will be well prepared, mother, when the time comes," answered her son, "but we trust that you may yet be spared us for many years."

Mrs. Carson was right, for one day less than three months later, her son, Father Dan, who had charge of a small parish in Eastern Pennsylvania, was alone in his room when a telegram was brought to him. "Come home, mother is dying," was all that it said, and Frank's name was signed to it. In little over an hour he was on the train going home, and he reached there the next morning. As he neared the home where all had been so happy when he left it only a few short weeks ago, a strange fear came over him that he might be too late, but he was not.

Clara met him at the door and led him at once to the sick room, where he found not only his brothers and sisters who lived near home, but those who had come from a distance, and they were all waiting for the last. His sister, Alice, now Sister Agatha, had come home from the hospital, accom-

panied by one of the other sisters, and she supported her mother's head on her bosom, and Father Bristol was at her side ready to baptize his mother in case his brother, whom she wished to have administer that sacrament to her, did not come in time.

Mrs. Carson had been taken suddenly ill three days before, and all but Dan had been sent for immediately, but as no serious danger was at first apprehended, they did not think it best to call him away from his parish, which was so far away, until the day before his mother was thought to be dying. Father Bristol would have baptized her then, but she said she wished Dan to do it, and she could not die until he came. Several times during the night she would rise as from a stupor and ask, "Has Dan come yet?" but before they could answer she would sink back on her pillow.

When Dan entered the room her face brightened and, extending her hand toward him, she said, "I am so glad you have come ; I could not die without you—her voice faltered—please baptize me now, I am ready."

The young priest was overcome with grief, but there could be no delay, for his mother's life was fast ebbing away. His brother had everything in readiness for the administration of the sacrament,

and he exercised a wonderful control over himself as he gave it. His mother answered his questions in a weak but clear voice, and a happy light covered her face when it was over. One by one she bade her children and grandchildren good-bye and asked them to pray for her when she was gone. She held Clara's hand longer than any of the others and her last words to her were, "Remember, Clara, what I have told you." To Alice and the two priests she said, "You three give me the greatest consolation I have in dying, and I thank God that you have chosen to lead such holy lives." The parting with her aged companion was the hardest to behold, but the grief at her loss was lessened by his joy at knowing that she had at last joined the true fold. With the cleansing water of holy baptism still moist on her brow, she yielded up her soul to her Creator.

The two old people who had spent many years together could not be separated long. One morning in May, when Frank went to his father's room to help him dress, he did not greet him as usual, and going nearer to the bed he found that he was sleeping the peaceful slumber of death, and his eyes were open to behold the glories of another world.

Clara did not forget what her mother, when

dying, had told her to remember, and in a short time she was baptized with her two daughters, and they are now very sincere Catholics, but her son cannot be prevailed upon to give up the religion in which she had brought him up, and, although he is everything his mother could wish of him in every other respect, he shows little respect even for that creed, and he is the source of much anxiety to her.

THE END

OF

FARMER CARSON'S SONS.

THE BROWN CURL.

CHAPTER I.

AUNT LAURA MARKHAM was a great favorite among the children of her brother, with whom she made her home, and they never seemed happier than when they were with her, while she found the greatest pleasure in the company of her little nieces and nephews. Although she had passed her fortieth birthday, the memory of her own youthful days was still fresh in her mind and she possessed those charming ways which win so many friends among the young. One of her greatest attractions was her art of story telling and the children spent many pleasant hours listening to the interesting tales which she never wearied of telling them, but what interested the girls most was to hear of her school days and some of the old friends whom she had known in the convent where she received her education, and whom she never forgot.

It was a rainy Saturday afternoon in April and

Aunt Laura had gone to her room to put the things in order which her little six year old niece had scattered about that morning. She had nearly finished when, glancing up to the top shelf of her closet, her eyes rested on a small wooden box, and, wondering what its contents might be, she took it down.

The box contained a few treasures which she had saved from those happy school days now several years passed, and as she took them out one by one and laid them on the table her thoughts wandered back to the time when they had been kept among her dearest treasures, and scarcely a week had passed without her looking them over, then she remembered how she had packed them away in this box when she was preparing to go away on a long visit some years ago and had put them away where they had long since been forgotten. From this her thoughts went back to the days when they had been collected, and in her mental vision she saw again many of the scenes of that time and the dear old friends she had loved at school were with her again.

Just then a rap came to the door, and without raising her eyes from the table she said, "Come in," knowing that it was one of her brother's children.

The door opened and a girl of about fourteen entered. "Oh, it's you, Clara, I am glad you have come," said her aunt smiling, for this was her favorite among the children.

"Yes, auntie," said the girl, "it is so dreary this afternoon, I thought you must be lonesome, so I have come up to spend the afternoon with you."

"Thank you, dear," said Aunt Laura, "I do not know what I should do during your mother's absence if it were not for you. It is so lonely without her, but she will be home Monday, and I think we can keep each other company until her return."

Clara was about to answer when her eyes fell upon a dark brown tress which lay on the table. "What a beautiful curl," she exclaimed, holding it up and looking at it admiringly.

"Very beautiful," answered Aunt Laura, "but not any more beautiful than the girl who once wore it."

"Who was she?" asked Clara. "Please describe her to me and tell me all about her."

"Her name was Melissa Chambers," said Aunt Laura.

"Melissa," repeated Clara, "what a pretty name, though so odd."

“Yes,” said Aunt Laura, “I always admired the name, but you wanted me to tell you about the girl. I first met her at the Academy of St. — in Detroit, when I was fifteen. She commenced school there in the beginning of the fall term and for the first few weeks was a day scholar, while I was a boarder, but about the middle of October her mother, a widow, was obliged on account of poor health to break up housekeeping and go to a hotel to board, while Melissa, her only child, came to board at the Academy.

“Although three years younger than myself, Melissa soon became one of my dearest friends, and she was with me more than with those of her own age. I soon learned that she had a most loving disposition and was one of the sweetest girls I ever knew, but, poor Melissa, she was almost a spoiled child, and I hope she will forgive me now if I say she had one fault for which I can hardly blame her when I think of her as she was then. She was very fond of looking in her mirror, and too well pleased with the picture she saw there. It was the picture of a fair, childish face, with light blue eyes, which contrasted most beautifully with her long brown curls. Poor child, she knew she was pretty and she wished others to think so too.

“Her mother often took her away to spend Saturday or Sunday with her, and it was on her return from one of these visits, which she made about the middle of April, after she came to the academy to board, that she complained of feeling slightly ill. When we were about to retire she told me that in the morning she called on a little girl who was sick, but as the doctor had not arrived before she left her, she did not know what was the matter.

“We had a private room together that term, and, although, I did not fully realize it then, I have often thought since that it was very fortunate we did, for in the morning Melissa had a fever and was quite ill. I called in the mistress of boarders, and when she saw how bad Melissa was, she sent immediately for a physician who, when he came, said that she had the scarlet fever. Had she been in one of the dormitories it would probably have spread through the whole boarding school. I had had the fever when I was quite small, so there was no fear for me.

“The dormitories and nearly all the rooms used by the boarders were in the southern part of the building, while the infirmary was on the upper floor of the north wing. It was there that Meilss was taken and I begged to be al-

lowed to remain with her, at least part of the time, but the Sisters objected to this, saying that my studies could not be neglected and if I went to my classes after visiting her, I would be exposing my classmates to the fever. As it was now, I was obliged to keep away from the other girls for two days, but on the third day I was with them and in my classes again.

“For five days I only heard from Melissa through the Sisters, and each day her condition was reported as worse. I could not study or think of anything but my little friend, whom I feared would die without my seeing her again. Often during study hour I found myself so deeply buried in thoughts of Melissa that I almost forgot where I was, and when called on to recite I could hardly answer a question. I would dream of her at night and awake with a start as if some one were at my bedside telling me she was dying.

“I could endure the suspense of being kept from my dear friend no longer, for I felt that she would certainly die and I must be with her, and on Saturday morning I went to my room, as usual, after breakfast, to put my things in order. This I did very quickly, and while the mistress of the boarders was in the dormitory, I stole quietly up stairs to the infirmary. I looked around to see

that no one saw me, then pushed the door open, and going in closed it carefully behind me. The nurse had gone out and left Melissa asleep, but she awoke when I entered.

“Oh, Laura,” she said when she saw me, “I am so glad to see you—I was so lonesome without you and told the Sisters I wanted to see you, but they said you did not have time to leave your studies. Why did you stay away from me so long?”

“I bent over her and throwing her arms around my neck she kissed me, then told me to sit down and remain with her until the nurse returned, but I did not dare to do this, as I must get back to my room before I was found out.

“How I wish you could remain with me until I am better,” she said. “The time would not seem half so long if you were here, for you could read to me and tell me stories. The nurse is so quiet I don’t like to have to be alone with her all of the time and you know mamma cannot be here very much, so it is very lonesome.”

“At that moment I heard a footstep in the hall and my first inclination was to hide but that would be of no use. The door opened and I looked up expecting to see the nurse, but instead it was Sister Superior and the doctor. Sister looked at

me very sternly and said, "Laura, why are you here? Who gave you permission to come?"

"I hardly knew what to say after having been so strictly forbidden to come to this room, for fear of exposing the others to the fever, and only now it occurred to me how rash I had been in thinking of returning to them without having it known. 'I hope you will pardon me, Sister,' I said 'for disobeying you; but I could not remain away from Melissa any longer.' Then growing bolder and, I think, hardly realizing what I was saying, I continued, "As much as I prize the time spent in school, I rather give up my studies than be kept from her when she is so very ill."

"Please, Sister, let Laura remain with me," said Melissa, 'for I am so lonely without her;' but Sister objected, saying that I could not lose the time.

"Tears filled her eyes and she said pleadingly, 'Please, Sister, do not send her away from me,' but it seemed to be of no use for one look from Sister was enough and I started to go out. The doctor told me to wait a few minutes in the hall, so I walked down to a window at the end of the hall and waited for them to come out. I had noticed that he looked very much troubled when

he saw Melissa and this made it harder for me to think of being separated from her, even though I could hear from her every day. I might as well have been in a distant part of the city as in the same building with her when I could not see her.

“For some minutes the doctor and Sister Superior stood a little distance from me, talking in a low tone. I heard him say that Melissa’s condition was worse than yesterday and he looked very grave as he added that there was some doubt as to her recovery. My heart sank within me and it was with difficulty I kept from betraying that I was listening, but I felt happier when I heard him say that if Melissa insisted upon having me remain with her, it would be better for me to do so for a few days, at least, even if I did have to give up my studies for a while. I felt like thanking him for his kindness, but I dared not. Sister rather reluctantly consented and from that time until my little friend was able to sit up I scarcely left the infirmary either night or day. I occupied a little cot next to Melissa’s bed and in the night I was always awake at the slightest sound she made. I often marvel now how my strength held out so well when I lost so much rest, but I kept up and felt none the worse for it.

“The first night and several days following, she

was so much worse that nearly all hope for her life had been abandoned. She was prepared for death on the second day, and no one can know the grief that I felt as with the nurse and her mother I watched over her—waiting for the end and unwilling to part with her. I almost felt then that her mother could not feel much more grieved than I did. Part of the time she was in a sort of delirium and seemed to recognize no one. I felt that I was in the way at these times, and would have left the room, but even then she seemed to miss me if I were not at her bedside. When at the end of the fifth day a slight change for the better came and the dear little invalid was pronounced almost out of danger, I believe that no one but her own mother could have been as happy as I, and even she could not have been more so.”

Aunt Laura glanced again at the brown curl and continued: “It was during this sickness that Melissa’s hair was cut off. I was with her when it was done and it grieved me sorely to see how bitterly she wept for the loss of her curls, for she said she would not be half as pretty when they were gone. We tried to console her by telling her that her hair would soon grow out thicker and prettier than before, but she would not listen to us. ‘I know I shall look so ugly

without them,' she said, 'and it will be so long before they grow again.' I noticed that after she returned to her room she avoided looking in her mirror for several weeks and then my proud little lady began to grow quite conceited over her short curls that were not so unbecoming, after all. When she looked at them she would sometimes laughingly call herself her 'mama's boy.' Her mother kept all of the shorn curls excepting this one, which Melissa said I should keep to remember her by.

“It was about three weeks before Melissa was able to sit up for any length of time or leave the infirmary, and she was only a mere shadow of that rosy-cheeked girl of so short a time ago, but she regained her strength quite rapidly. When she was again in her classes, her companions welcomed her as though she had been absent for months. I think I myself seemed little less a stranger to the girls. I was able to resume my studies with my class for I had had all of my books with me during Melissa's illness and by studying while she was asleep had not missed a lesson, which fully satisfied my teachers for the time they had worried about my losing.

“After this we two were more attached to each other than ever, and Melissa often said that she

feared that she would never have recovered had it not been for my kindness to her, but this, of course, was all imagination on her part. As the close of school drew near, we began to wish that it were farther off, for as I lived in central New York and Melissa in Detroit, we did not expect to meet again until school re-opened in the fall, and what a long time it seemed to us children, who, although entire strangers only a year ago, seemed more like own sisters now. I invited her to come home with me for a few weeks, but her mother thought she could not spare her after being separated from her all the year.

“The day of parting came and it was even harder for us both than we had anticipated. I had hardly realized until that day what a sisterly attachment had sprung up between us. Many loving good-byes were exchanged and with a promise from me to write as soon as I reached home, we parted at the front door of the Academy. I shall never forget how sweet Melissa looked that morning, when about half way down the walk, I turned around hoping to get another glimpse of her. She was standing on the veranda, watching me out of sight, robed in a white dress and her head covered with short brown curls, while her face was still almost as colorless as her dress. There

were tears in her eyes as she waved me a last farewell, but she smiled and tried to hide them. What a pretty picture of childish innocence and simplicity she was. That is the picture of my Melissa which remains with me until this day as the most perfect picture of her. Although it has been over twenty years since that day, I can almost see her now. I did not dream how long it would be ere we would meet again, and how changed she would be from that fair child who looked more like a spirit from the other world.

Each week for the first seven weeks brought a letter, and sometimes two from Melissa. Long, affectionate letters they were, and in each she spoke of the time we would be together again. The last three weeks of the vacation I spent with friends in the country some distance from home, and as I visited different places I could not have my mail sent to me, so I did not get any until my return home the latter part of the first week of September.

Among other letters which had been received during my absence was one from Melissa written the day after I left home. It said that her mother had decided upon taking her to New York to be educated, but she did not know when they would go. Another letter from her, dated two weeks

later, spoke of her first letter which was still unanswered, and which she thought might have been lost in the mails. Her closing words were, 'I shall be at the academy the day school opens, and I hope you will be there, as we will probably start the next day and I wish to see you before I go.' I could see in both letters that Melissa greatly regretted leaving our school. She said that she did not wish to go among strangers and be obliged to make new friends, when she was leaving so many behind her, but her mother thought it would be better for her to attend the school she had selected for her in New York, as it might give her the chance of an entrance into better society after her school days were over. I hardly knew why it was, but I shed many tears over these letters, and I thought her mother was very imprudent in taking her from the school where she had been so happy.

School had opened two days before I reached home, and Melissa had undoubtedly left the city before this. Had I known it in time, I would have written to her to stop at our home on her way. I tried to content myself with the thought that she might possibly have been delayed for a few days and I might see her, but when two days after receiving the letter I was again in school, I

found her gone.

“Melissa had called at the academy the day school opened, again the next day and just before her departure the third day, hoping to see me. The girls, with whom she had left many messages for me, gathered around me and told me that she had been both puzzled and disappointed because I had neither written to her nor returned in time to see her. She was certain that I had received one of her letters, if not both, and she thought that she might have offended me, but did not know how. I obtained her address from one of the girls and wrote her a long letter that evening, explaining everything.

“An answer soon came, and for the next two years, until I graduated, we kept up a regular correspondence, but did not see each other during that time. Some of Melissa's letters were long and affectionate, while others were only short notes, and in these, which were not less friendly, she said that she was kept so busy with her studies that she found little time to devote to her correspondence. I imagined that there was a touch of sadness in many of her missives. Although she liked her new school very much, she did not seem contented there, as she had at our academy, but she would not mention this to her mother, who

thought that she was now in a school that was better suited to her than ours. More than once she had told me in her letters that it seemed more like home to her in Detroit, and she would like to return to finish her education in the school where she had commenced it.

“Immediately after I graduated I went to Europe with my parents, and remained there a year and a half. While in New York, before we sailed, I called at the academy where Melissa had been, but the Sisters told me that at the close of school she had left the city with her mother. They did not know where they had gone, but they gave me the address of some of her mother’s friends, who they thought could tell me. I called on them, but received no definite information, the only thing I could learn, being that they had gone west to spend the summer. They were expecting a letter from her mother and promised to send me her address as soon as they received it, but they failed to do so. On my return to New York I again tried to find my friend, but fate seemed to have separated us. I learned from the Sisters that she had returned to their academy a short time after my departure, but had remained there only a year, and leaving at the close of school, nearly six months before, had left the city and had not been heard from

since. All inquiries made of her friends proved almost as fruitless, for no one seemed to know of her whereabouts. I watched each mail for several months, hoping that I might hear from her, but it seemed as if I, whom she had once loved so much, had been forgotten, and perhaps new friends shared my place in her affections.

CHAPTER II.

“AFTER my European visit I remained at home four years, until I accepted an invitation from an old schoolmate, who was married to a wealthy lawyer and now lived in Brooklyn, to spend the winter at her home. The lady moved in the most fashionable circles in the city, received a great deal of company and went a great deal. As her guest, I was always with her whenever society called upon her for homage, so I naturally became well acquainted with its whims and the names of its greatest favorites. It was from one of my friend’s callers, whom I met the day after my arrival at her home, that I heard of a Miss Chambers, a young lady from the west, who was visiting in the city and was about to make her first appearance in society that season. They did not know the name of the place she came from. By their conversation I saw at once that she was to be a great favorite. They said that she was an orphan with no near relatives and was very beautiful.

“Can it be Melissa? I thought. She was

about the same age as the one they had mentioned, and if she were beautiful when a child she must be much more so now, for her beauty had been of the kind that promised to increase with the approach of womanhood, but was her mother dead? This I resolved to find out, and if she were only my dear old friend, how much would I not give to see her once more. Then I thought, had that conceit which had been so strong in her on account of her beauty when a child, been increased by the flatteries I knew she must be receiving, so that she would no longer care for her old school friends? True, she had neglected even sending me a line of friendship for several years, but I could not believe that my Melissa had entirely forgotten me. The opportunity for me to see her presented itself sooner than I had expected.

“About an hour after the callers departed, I was in my room, thinking of Melissa, when the tea bell rang, and I went down to join the family. After tea they told me that they wished me to be ready in an hour to go to the theatre. It was the first play I attended in the city, and also a great European actress’ first appearance on the American stage. So interested in it was I that I entirely forgot my old friend.

“Just before the play commenced a party of

young people entered the box directly opposite us. My attention was particularly attracted by one of them, a girl of about nineteen or twenty. She seemed to bear a resemblance to someone I had seen before, but I could not then recall who. All I knew was that she was exceedingly beautiful, and by the occasional admiring glances favored her by different members of the party, especially a young gentleman at her side, who appeared to be a foreigner and who was probably her escort, I soon became aware that I was not alone in my belief. Her's was a face of the most striking beauty, and one when once seen not easily to be forgotten. Her complexion was very fair and her cheeks rosy, but I could not distinguish whether her eyes were light or dark, but in the brilliant light of the hall I thought they were dark. Her luxuriant brown hair was done up quite high to meet a small turban; a deep red opera cloak, trimmed with ermine, was thrown over the back of her chair, and she wore a dress of the same deep hue, which added greatly to her personal charms.

“I watched her for a few minutes, then asked one of my companions who she was, but they said that she must be a stranger, as they had never seen her before. The curtain rose at that

moment and I soon became so absorbed in the play that I forgot the young lady until, alone in my room that night, I found myself wondering who she was and whether I would ever have the good fortune to see her again, which I hoped I would. I fell asleep, thinking of her, and her sweet face appeared in my dreams many times during the night.

“Four days passed and I learned nothing of the young lady, neither did I hear anything more of Melissa. Strange to say, I had never once thought of associating these two until the evening of the fourth day I attended a grand ball given in honor of a young English nobleman who, after spending the autumn traveling in the south and west, had come to New York for a few months before returning home. I had never met him and was, therefore, much surprised when, on being introduced to him, I saw that he was the same one who had been at the theatre with the heroine of my thoughts. She was here, of course, and how fair she looked. She wore a plain white silk and not a single jewel but, despite the plainness of her apparel, there was not one of the beautifully dressed belles with their glittering jewels who could compete with her. I noticed that the young nobleman to-night, as when I saw them before, seemed to

notice none of those gay ladies who were trying to be as agreeable as possible when he was in sight, but his eyes seemed to follow her wherever she went, while she, like an innocent child, paid no more heed to him than courtesy demanded, for she was blind to his admiration. Others also tried to pay her homage, but I could plainly see that she cared little for any of them.

“I watched her for some time, vainly hoping for an introduction to her, and would have asked the hostess for one, but surrounded as she was by so many admirers who would claim her now for a dance and then for a little conversation, it seemed impossible for a stranger to even hope for a word with her. Once I passed near enough to her to see that there was an almost tearful sadness in her soft blue eye, and I stopped for a moment to look at her, for that face seemed a little familiar, but the next I was hurried away to take my place in a set which was just forming on. As my friend with whom I came was not feeling very well that evening, we went home quite early, and I was very much disappointed to think that I had not met her, who above all the others, I wished most to receive an introduction to, and had not even heard her name mentioned.

“My friend was quite ill for the next three or

four days, and in my thoughts of her I again forgot that mysterious beauty, until about a week and a half after the ball when we went out together for the first time to attend an afternoon tea. We were in the dressing room taking off our wraps when two ladies entered; one middle-aged who, had there been any resemblance between them, might have passed for the mother of her companion, in whom she appeared to feel a deep interest; the other I recognized at a glance to be my heroine.

“The girl did not notice me, so I had a better chance to scan her face, and I made a happy discovery. It was her bright blue eyes and dark brown, almost black hair, that attracted my notice now, for I knew that they could belong to only one person in the world. It must be Melissa, and just then I heard some one address her as Miss Chambers. I was right in my supposition, and oh! how happy I was to know it. Although she was far more beautiful than when I last saw her, I could not have failed to recognize her now, and marvelled that I did not know her at the ball. I looked at her, thought of the two last occasions when I had seen her, without knowing her, then of the little girl who had waived me a farewell from the door of the convent, and I hardly knew why it was, but how I wished her back where she

was then.

“I could not wait for an introduction, so I stepped up to her and said, ‘Pardon me, but isn’t this Miss Melissa Chambers?’ The girl turned to me and in a low musical voice, which had greatly changed since I had last heard her speak, she answered that that was her name; then after studying my face for a moment added, ‘Haven’t we met somewhere before? Your face is familiar but I cannot recall you.’

“‘Yes,’ I answered, ‘we met at St. — Academy in Detroit. Do you not remember your old friend and schoolmate, Laura Markham?’ I asked.

“An expression of mingled joy and surprise covered her face, as grasping my hand firmly she said, ‘Remember Laura Markham, will I ever forget her? and is it true that you are really my dear old friend from whom I have not heard in so long?’—Her tone was more familiar now.—‘I am so glad to meet you once more.’

“That afternoon was one of the most enjoyable ones I spent in the city, for Melissa was with me most of the time when not devoting her attentions to the lady with whom she came and to whom she seemed greatly attached. As I watched her and listened to her conversation, she seemed to

grow more and more like the Melissa of other days, but I could not help feeling a little grieved to notice that she still retained one trait of her childhood which had grown stronger with her years. She had paused a moment too long at the mirror to fix a stray curl which would fall over her brow, and she would not leave the dressing room until she saw that every fold of her dress hung perfectly, then with an air of pride she had gone down to the drawing room escorted by the lady who acted as her guardian.

“Before we separated Melissa promised to spend the next afternoon with me. My hostess having been invited out, I was alone when she came; so we had a good opportunity to talk over all that had happened since we last met.

“Melissa told me how she had spent the past few years since I had heard from her. Leaving New York with her mother, about a week before the time I had tried to find her previous to my departure for Europe, she went to Indiana for the summer, and in the fall returned to school, as the Sisters had informed me the second time I called on them. Her intention had been to remain there until she finished, but her mother's health being very poor the next spring, her physician recommended a change of climate. Accordingly as

soon as school closed they again went west and would have returned at the opening of the fall term but the physicians advised her mother not to go back and she would not go without her; so the next year found her in a fashionable academy in Chicago while her mother was in a little town a few miles out of the city and they saw each other once a week or oftener.

“At first the climate seemed to help her mother and she was much stronger than she had been for several years but she caught a severe cold after she had been there a little over a year which caused pneumonia and she never fully recovered from the effects of it. When Melissa was nearly seventeen, about a year before she was to finish in school, her mother was taken very ill and for a second time she left school to be with her. They had expected to cross the ocean for her health that summer, but they had to postpone the trip now and intended going in the fall, but the invalid had reached the last stages of that dread disease consumption, and no medical skill was of any avail to her now. Melissa wept bitterly when she reached this part of the story and it was only amid sobs that she told how on the twentieth of August, just ten weeks from the day that her mother was taken sick, she died.

“She was left alone in the world with neither a home or a relative to care for her, but fortunately she had a small fortune which rendered her independent and the Sisters were very kind to her. Although she missed her mother very much, she hardly realized her lonely and homeless condition until she graduated the next June, and when her classmates were returning to their pleasant homes she was very much grieved to know that she had none to go to. About two weeks later she went to Detroit to visit friends and intended making her home at the academy where we had first met. She remained there little over a year and then her mother’s old friend, with whom she was staying now, hearing of her lonely condition, came to Detroit and asked her to accompany her to Europe. She accepted the invitation, more because her own health was not very good (and the Sisters advised the trip) than because she cared to leave the place which as in her childhood had seemed like home to her.

“They were gone six months and on their return the lady wished her to remain at her home but she felt too independent to accept any further kindness from her, so she went back to her old school, feeling that although she had no home, she had found one who would be a mother to her. Al-

most weekly letters came from her friend and in many of them she said she would be pleased to have her visit her at any time, but none of the invitations were accepted until September, when she received a very pressing one to spend the winter with her.

“She had been in the city about five weeks when I first saw her at the theatre, and the young people she was with then were very intimate friends of her hostess. In her youth this lady had been a very brilliant member of society, but since the death of her husband, five years before, she had went very little until Melissa came, and she re-entered the social ranks in order to introduce her young friend into them, and in so doing she felt that she was carrying out the designs of her old friend, Melissa’s mother.

“After this we spent much of our time together and we often met at fashionable gatherings. On all of these occasions I noticed that Melissa’s beauty, together with her gracefulness and simple but beautiful style of dress, attracted much attention. She never wore jewels of any kind, and the reason was that she did not think it would be proper for her after so lately taking off mourning for her mother, but she spent a great deal of time studying the effects of different styles, and I knew

that what I had suspected of her was true. She was indeed the same vain child that she had been years ago. If she had felt that she was pretty then, she felt it much more now, and the many flatteries she received strengthened this feeling. This was her only failing, and how sorry I felt for her, for I felt that her conceit might sometime bring her to grief. Despite of her apparent light-heartedness, I could almost see at times that she was not quite contented in the place she occupied now, and I thought she would have been better off had she remained within the quiet walls of the convent, where she would ever be free from the sorrows as well as the gaieties of social life; but after a time this seemed to die away and she was as happy as a bird.

“Nearly everywhere I met her, when at a party, I noticed that the young English nobleman, whom I have mentioned before, was the most ardent of her admirers, and I soon began to doubt as to her being wholly unconscious of his admiration, though she never spoke of him as any more than a friend, and seemed to care no more for him than she did for any of her other acquaintances, while even I who, besides the lady who had taken her mother’s place, was her only confident, would not mention so delicate a matter to her, or even let her

suspect that I noticed it. However, I hoped that he would prove worthy of my orphan friend and would take her to his home as his bride. For poor Melissa, how desolate she must be to know that she had no home.

“It was during the Christmas holidays that Melissa called on me one day, her face aglow with smiles, and said she had a secret for me. At the same time she held up her hand, on which glittered an elegant solitaire diamond ring, and said, ‘Isn’t it beautiful, Laura? It is one of my Christmas presents and the first jewel I have ever worn.’

“I examined the ring, and as far as my inexperienced eye could judge, I thought it was the finest stone I had ever seen. ‘Who was so kind as to give you such an elegant present? I asked.’

“She smiled, her face crimsoned a little, and I thought I had never seen her look so beautiful as when she answered, ‘It is my secret and you will keep it for me?’

“‘Certainly, Melissa,’ I answered, ‘did you ever know me to betray anything you have told me?’ and I guessed the truth before I heard it from her lips.

“‘Laura, you have ever been my truest friend,’ she said, ‘and I want you to be the first one to

know of my engagement. Lord Montrose has asked me to marry him, and this is my engagement ring.'

" 'Is that so, Melissa?' I said, 'for your sake I am very happy to hear of it.'

" 'Yes,' she answered, 'it was only the day before Christmas he asked me, and it was so sudden, I had never dreamed of such a thing, but when I thought what a noble family he belongs to and what a beautiful home he has,—while I, who am I but a lone orphan—I accepted him.'

" 'I hope it will bring you happiness, Melissa', I said.

" 'I know I shall be happy,' she answered, 'and only think I shall be Lady Montrose and the mistress of one of the grandest private palaces in England. I never told you that I saw his home several times while I was in England, a year ago. The house is perfectly grand and the extensive park and grounds adjoining it are like a perfect fairy land. The master of the house was not at home then, but I heard a great deal about him; so I know well who he is, but oh! Laura, who would ever have dreamed that I was to be the future mistress of that grand estate? It seems more like the fairy tales you used to tell me when I was sick, than a reality.'

“Melissa was indeed very happy now, and for a long time she talked of her engagement and the beautiful home on the other side of the Atlantic which was to be hers. More than once she told how surprised she was to think that the young foreigner should care for her, who was poor and unknown, when he might so easily have won the hand of some grand and wealthy lady of his own rank and nationality. This American girl did not know that it was her extreme beauty that attracted his admiration more than all the noble blood of England, and the first time he saw her he determined to win her and to take her home with him as his bride.

“In the spring their engagement was announced, and I was just preparing to leave the city when I learned that the wedding was to take place the following August or September. Melissa intended spending a few weeks at the sea shore with her hostess, and on their return was to remain with her until she was married. The wedding was to be a very quiet affair, the majority of Melissa's friends only being present at the church, and a very few of the most intimate ones sharing the wedding breakfast at the house. After a short visit to Detroit, where my friend was to pay a farewell visit to the home of her childhood and the graves of her parents, they were to sail for Eng-

land.

“It was only a week after the engagement was announced that Lord Montrose was unexpectedly called home on account of the serious illness of his mother. He sailed the day that he received the message, but he was too late, for she was dead before he reached her. Left an orphan now, with only one younger sister who was not yet of age, he was kept at home several months, and consequently the wedding had to be postponed.

“Melissa went to the sea shore for a while, but growing tired of the gay life there, which without the presence of the one who was to be her husband, soon grew rather dull, she came to visit me and remained until after Christmas, when she again went to Brooklyn. In the meantime nearly every mail from England brought a letter from the absent one. She did not know when the wedding was to take place until about two weeks before her return to the city, when she received word that he expected to be at liberty to come in the spring, and she was to gather her bridal roses early in June.

“At times, while at my home, she had seemed very happy at the thought of her approaching marriage, and would talk for hours of the beautiful home across the sea and all the pleasures in store

for her ; and again, I know not why it was, but she seemed almost melancholy at the mention of it, and I began to have a misgiving that her marriage might not be as happy as she anticipated. She even said to me one day when in one of her sad moods, 'It seems as if something dreadful will happen,' and although I half believed her, I tried to persuade her that it was only imagination.

"As I was to be her bridesmaid, I went to Brooklyn about the middle of May to help in the preparations which were already commenced. She received a dispatch the day of my arrival, saying that Lord Montrose was to sail that day, and how happy she was to think that in a few days more he would be with her, and then a little over a week after his arrival she would be no longer Melissa Chambers but Lady Montr'ose.

"I think I never saw her as happy as on the day the steamer was due. She arose early in the morning and several times during the day messengers were sent to the harbor to see if she had anchored, only to bring back the news that nothing had been heard from her. The next day it was the same, and we tried to explain to Melissa that the steamer might have been delayed and might anchor the next day. The watch continued for thirteen days and then news came that the steamer had

gone down at mid-ocean and all on board had been lost.

“Unfortunately, Melissa was the first one to learn the sad news, having read it in the morning paper, which was brought to her room by an imprudent servant before anyone else saw it. It was a terrible shock to her, and the fact that she had neither home or relatives, made it harder for her to bear.

“For a few weeks she remained with her friend, who in her affliction, was more a mother to her than ever before, and about the middle of July was prevailed upon by her to go again to the seashore, where it was thought she might improve her health, which was quite poor. The seashore was more distasteful to her than ever, but at the advice of her physicians she remained there about seven weeks.

“When the season at the seashore was over, she wrote to me that as soon as her health was sufficiently recovered, she intended going to Detroit to join the order of Sisters who taught at St. — Academy. It was a secret, she said, and as I was the only one she had ever hinted it to, I must keep it for her. This I knew had been the greatest desire of her childhood, but as she grew older and entered the ranks of society, she be-

came so blinded by its flatteries and false pleasures that she soon gave up the idea. She found too much enjoyment in society to forsake it until, left alone in the world, she awoke to the fact that its gilded pleasures were not as bright as they had appeared.

“I invited her to spend the winter with me, thinking that the quiet country would be more beneficial to her health, but she declined my invitation, saying that she did not wish to give up the physician with whom she was doctoring, as she was certain he would cure her, and she preferred staying for the present at the convent, where she had attended school in New York. None of her friends, not even the lady who had given her a home in Brooklyn, knew where she was now, and she hoped to keep her whereabouts unknown to them all; first, because she wished never to meet any of them again, and second, because she did not wish to be a burden any longer on the one who had shown her so much kindness already, and who, she knew, would insist on taking her to her home again if she knew she was sick. She remained at the convent a few months, and, although she bravely fought against her dread malady, it was noticed that her health was gradually failing, until at last she was pronounced be

yond help.

“It was early in the spring when I received a letter from one of the Sisters at the hospital, saying that Melissa had been brought there about two weeks before, and would like to see me. Two days later I was at her bedside. She was overjoyed to see me, and she told me she had feared we would never meet again. But what a great change had come over her, and who would have believed that this white faced invalid, whose only color was a deep hectic flush on each cheek, was the same bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked society belle, who so short a time ago had been noted for her great beauty. It was with difficulty that I suppressed my tears when I saw her, but I would not add to her sufferings by letting her know how grieved I was to see her thus.

“As she lay there, how much she reminded me of the little girl by whose bedside I had watched a few years before, and yet I could hardly believe that she was the same. To-day, as on that day, she had fallen into a restless slumber, but my entrance into her room awoke her, and her greeting was much as it had been then, a most affectionate one. She pressed my hand to her almost colorless lips and said, ‘Laura, my dearest friend,’ I am so glad that you have come, and you will

remain with me until I am better, won't you?' I promised her I would remain in the city for a few weeks, and would see her every day. She seemed pleased, for although she spoke of getting well, I know she felt then, that at the end of those few weeks, she would probably be gone.

"The days passed slowly, and as I boarded near the hospital, I was with her the greater part of the time. At times she seemed quite well and was able to go with me for short drives, or to be wheeled about the park in an invalid's chair; then, at other times, she would sink so low that it seemed as if the day of her death had come. I dared not speak to her of coming home, for she often told me I was the only one in the world she had to care for her now, and she did not want me to leave her.

"One day when I was alone with her she said: 'Laura, do you remember how, when a child, I always said I would like to be a Sister?' I told her that I did, and she continued, 'That was my intention while in school, and it was with that one object in view that I studied so hard while in school. It was only to please my mother that I ever had any thoughts of entering society, for the idea always seemed very distasteful to me. After mother's death, I was more than ever attached

to the convent, but when I received an invitation to spend the winter in Brooklyn, I would not have gone had not the Sisters advised me to, saying that it would be better for me to see a little of the world's ways ere I bid it adieu, and if I had a true vocation it would lead me back to them before long. They were blind, however, to that one great fault, vanity, which was so strong within me, and which was destined to bring me to sorrow.

“Melissa paused here, and I shuddered when I thought how some time ago I had had misgivings of this, and now had they indeed become a reality? Melissa went on. “The gay life into which I was plunged on my entrance in the social world, was such a contrast to the blissful quietness of the convent, that I did not like it at first, but was too proud to let any one know it; however, I too soon grew accustomed to it and learned to enjoy it. The flatteries I received pleased me too much to give them up, and like the gay friends I had made I began to think that my face was too pretty to hide under the black veil of a nun; so I gave up the thought of ever returning to my peaceful home, as the convent had been for so many years.

“Often during my visit to you, while away from my gay city friends, the thought would

come to me that the convent was the right place for me, and it would be best for me to break my engagement and return to it, but I would banish it from my mind and try to think instead of the beautiful home across the sea where I would reign as queen, enjoying the affections of one of the truest of husbands and the company of some of England's noblest people. As these enchanting ideas passed through my mind, it would occur to me that it had only been a foolish childish whim to think of shutting myself up in the convent.

“When I heard that sad news, which I can hardly mention now, and which I believe was a just punishment for my pride, the memories of my happy school days returned to me with new vividness, and I resolved to carry out those old resolutions, but it was too late. God would not accept my second love which I had so wilfully taken from him to bestow upon another, who is now sleeping in a watery grave, all through my fault, and cannot help me to face the doom which awaits me. All I can do now is to wait patiently for the time when God shall be pleased to take me from home, which I do not think is far off.

“This was the first time she had ever spoken of death, and after she had finished she drew to His her bosom a small silken case, which was held by

a cord around her neck, and said she wished me to do her a favor. The case contained her engagement ring, and handing it me, she said, 'Laura, the stone in that ring is very valuable, and I wish to sell it and have a new altar put in the chapel at St. — Academy in Detroit as a tribute to my memory. I have never been a moment without it since the day he placed it on my finger, but I will not want it much longer, so take it now to some reliable jeweler and see what you can get for it. Do not delay, for I want to know that the altar has been ordered before I die, and I can think then that some day the Holy Sacrifice may be offered on it for me.'

"I did not wish to take such a responsibility upon myself, but Melissa's mind was so set on it that I had to obey, and it was with the greatest reluctance that I took the ring from her. I think that I never saw her so happy when the next day I told her that the price of it would buy a very handsome, though quite small, marble altar.

"After this she failed so rapidly that she received the last rites of the church the same week, and she began to long for death now rather than fear it, as she had at the beginning of her illness. Another week she lingered on between life and death, suffering intensely, but patiently, until the

last evening in May.

“The Sisters had all gone to the chapel for the closing of the May devotions, and I was alone with her. We had been listening to their sweet voices as they sang a May hymn, the last notes of which were just dying upon the air when Melissa said, ‘Laura, how sweet the voices of the Sisters sound to-night.’

“‘Yes’ Melissa,’ I answered, ‘But no sweeter than they always do.’

“She looked at me with an expression that I shall never forget ;—half of joy, half of sadness—and said, ‘They may not sound any sweeter to you, Laura’—her voice was sad and low as she spoke,—but to me they do, for—she paused for a moment as if to catch her fleeting breath—I can almost hear other far sweeter voices mingled with theirs. I am not afraid to die now and, oh ! I shall be so happy.’

“I knew that she was dying and I grasped the knob of the bell at her bedside to ring it, but while she was speaking, one of the Sisters had stepped into the room, followed by the chaplain of the hospital, who was just coming from the chapel. Her words had been overheard by both, and one glance at her pale face told them the end had come. At a signal from the priest we fell upon our knees

and he commenced the prayers for the dying, but they were not half finished when, at a motion from the sister, he changed to the recitation of the *De Profundis* for the soul that had just departed.

“The next morning I dispatched a messenger with the sad news to Melissa’s friend in Brooklyn, whom she had refused to see during her illness, but whom she wished to be informed of her death. The lady came that afternoon and shed many bitter tears over her young friend who had died in a hospital so near her, when she might have spent her days amid the luxuries of her home. She wished to have the body removed to her own home now, but it had been Melissa’s request to be buried from the hospital, and the Superior would not disrespect her wishes by permitting her to be taken away.

“On the morning of the second day her funeral was held at the hospital chapel, and she was sent that afternoon to Detroit, where she was buried beside her parents.

“Melissa’s old friend and myself were the only mourners, and of all that gay throng, who in the city across the river had so greatly admired her beauty and showered so many flatteries upon her only a little over a year before, not one came to pay a last tribute of respect to her before being taken

away to her grave. The beauty of their idol had faded and she was forgotten by all."

Aunt Laura ceased speaking and a tear fell upon the brown curl as she tenderly replaced it in the box. Clara, too, was in tears when she heard the end of the story of this beautiful girl, and she asked her aunt to show her Melissa's grave when she took her to Detroit the next fall to commence her studies at St. — Academy.

Aunt Laura promised she would, and when she went to Detroit with her niece the cemetery was one of the first places they visited. She had once known the location of the graves well, but now it was with the greatest difficulty that she found them, for they were overgrown with weeds and bushes, and only the stone that marked her father's grave could be found, while down among the weeds could just be discerned the mound where rested the once beautiful Melissa. Her only monument is the marble altar in the chapel, and Clara, who knows her story, always thinks of her, when after a day spent among her books she enters the chapel for her evening prayers.

Melissa had given up her vocation for the flatteries of the world, thinking that her face was too pretty to hide in the convent, but her conquests in society had lasted only two brief seasons, then in

the bloom and beauty of youth she had been forgotten by her admirers and laid away where :

“ The mighty caravan of life
Above her dust might sweep,
Nor shout, nor trampling foot should break
The rest of her last sleep.”

THE END

OF

THE BROWN CURL.

A NEW ENGLAND HERMIT

CHAPTER I.

“THE prayers of the congregation are requested for the happy repose of the soul of Margaret Conroy, who died yesterday, and whose funeral is to take place to-morrow at nine o’clock.”

These words were spoken by Father Wilson, the rector of St. Bernard’s Church in a little village in southern Maine, during Mass one morning in May. A look of surprise was on the faces of many of the listeners and tears filled their eyes when they heard this announcement, for the one who was prayed for that day had been in church with them the Sunday before as well as on every other Sunday for many years passed. A few had missed her from her accustomed place in a seat in the wing at the right of the altar, and wondered why she was not present, but as she had apparently been in the best of health when they

last saw her, no one dreamed that she was dead.

Margaret, or Maggie, as she had always been called, was a very strange person, for not one of her numberless friends knew who she was or whence she had come. All that was known of her was that more than thirty-five years ago she had come to the village and rented two or three small rooms in the basement of a tenement house near the church, and had made those same rooms her abode for several years, until the house being sold and repaired, she had taken pleasanter, though not larger quarters in another house near by. Here she had remained until the day when she left her humble lodgings to return no more. Those who visited her were particularly struck with the cheerfulness and order of what she was pleased to call home. The furniture was of the cheapest kind and was rather scanty, consisting only of what was necessary for her to keep house with, and in addition to this were a few luxuries in the form of a few books and two or three pious pictures on the wall. One of these which she prized very highly was a small but beautiful painting of "Our Mother of Sorrows," and those who knew Maggie best were greatly edified by the devotion which she had for our Blessed Lady under this title. Another picture which hung beside her

favorite was that of a sweet-faced woman, to whom our heroine bore a strong resemblance and who she said was her mother. A careful study of the picture could not help revealing that the woman was far above the poorer class, the air of refinement in her face, the richness of her dress, and the loftiness with which she held her head were proofs of this.

Those who remembered Margaret when she first came, said that at that time she had been a very handsome woman of not more than thirty, and her beauty had at first excited much admiration among the villagers, but as the years passed, her hair, which had been a beautiful brown, had slowly lost its rich color, her deep blue eyes had lost their brightness, and deep lines had gradually made their appearance on her face; so that she could no longer be called beautiful, but her kind face was still just as sweet if not sweeter than in her youth. What puzzled many was that, although apparently very poor, she had a superior education. Latin and French were as natural to her as the English tongue and she appeared to be well versed in several of the higher branches of education. She took great precaution not to let anyone know how well educated she was—but try as she might, she could not keep it entirely a

secret

Naturally the people of the village had tried repeatedly to find out who she was and where she came from. Some had questioned her, to receive no definite answer, and to have her change the subject immediately, and the busy gossipers of the town had set afloat many different stories concerning her, hoping that their curiosity might be satisfied, but without success; so after a while they gave up their efforts and thought no more of her history.

During the thirty five years of her residence in the village, she had supported herself by doing plain sewing, which she would carry home to the owner if it were not called for when finished, and on some of these occasions, if pressed very hard to do so, she would remain a few minutes; but as for calling on anyone, she was never known to do it excepting in time of sickness. If a poor person were sick, it mattered little how far away they were or how cold and stormy the weather might be, she was always one of the first to be at their bedside. Going fearlessly into homes where contagious diseases were and where few people would dare to enter, it was she who was their most faithful friend and nurse. She would often pay the physicians and buy their medicine from her

own scanty earnings, when they were unable to do so themselves, and would buy little dainties to tempt their appetite. It seemed as if she spent more money than she earned, for she was very poor, and to many it was almost a mystery how she supported herself. The parish priest, if called upon at the dead hour of the night to go to the bedside of some poor dying parishioner, was never surprised to find this same strange person waiting to accompany him.

There was scarcely a morning that she was not seen at Mass. She was often waiting on the doorsteps before the church was opened and was always among the last to leave when the divine services were over. If she were ever missed from her accustomed place, it was known that some poor person must be dangerously ill and she was with them.

She seemed to take little rest, for late at night the light might be seen burning brightly in her room, and any one who chanced to pass, if the curtains were drawn, might see her sitting by the table sewing, or pen in hand, bending over something she was writing, but no one had ever seen a line that she had written or been able to learn what it was that occupied so many long evenings.

Thus, through all these long years, she had

worked on through summer's heat and winter's storm, keeping aloof from all, yet making herself well known to everybody; always showing that saintly patience and sweetness of disposition which won the affection of all.

There were few, if any, in that large congregation called upon to pray for her this Sunday morning, who had not at some time felt or heard of her charity, and now that she had so suddenly been taken from them, her loss was keenly felt by all. Never in the history of St. Bernard's Church had prayers for the dead been offered up with more heartfelt fervor than they were now. A dear friend was gone whose place could never be filled, was all they thought of, and her loss came to the hearts of all as if they had lost a dear relative.

For the past few weeks Margaret, although she had appeared as well as usual to strangers, had been feeling very poorly, and those who saw most of her could not help noticing that she was slowly failing. She was advised to give up her work for a time, as she needed rest, but she refused, and kept up trying to hide her sickness, saying that she felt quite well, and working even more cheerfully than she ever had before. She lingered longer in the church after Mass now, and when

she did leave, it seemed to be with a feeling almost of regret that she could not spend more time there. The Friday morning before her death she was at Mass as usual, but it was only just over when she fainted. No one noticed it at first, as her head had fallen on her hands, which were resting on the back of the seat in front of her, and they thought that she was praying.

About an hour after Mass the sexton, passing through the church, saw her there motionless, and going over to speak to her found her insensible. She was carried to the convent adjoining the church, and laid on a bed from which she was never to arise. A physician was called, and when he saw her he said that she had, at most, but a few days more to live and she needed only perfect quiet and rest. She appeared to be afflicted with no disease, but had been worn out by the constant care and hard work taken upon herself. She had lived only for the good she could do, but her mission was done now, and when she heard the physician's words she received the tidings with joy saying, "Thanks be to God."

The whole day she spent in a sort of meditation, refusing to see anyone excepting the Sisters, who watched over her and the priest who came in the evening to hear her last confession and prepare

her for the sacraments of the dying. She also gave the strictest orders that her illness was not to be mentioned to anyone outside of the convent for fear that the Sisters would be troubled by some of her numberless friends, who might be calling to see her, or to inquire how she was. Early Saturday morning she received the Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction with the greatest fervor and devotion. She seemed to care for nothing now, and to think only of being united to her Creator in death, which came that evening, when she passed away as quietly as if she had only fallen into a peaceful slumber.

They laid her out in the convent chapel, and Sunday afternoon many poor people, to whom she had been a sister of charity, and those more favored by fortune, who knew her well for her kindness, came to take a last look at their beloved dead. They brought no flowers, because it was her will that none should be laid on her coffin. She asked only for a few sincere honest prayers from those who cared for her, and these were offered up to the throne of God in abundance, by lips that during her life had never tired of speaking her praises.

At the funeral on Monday morning, the church was crowded almost to overflow, and many were

the tears that were shed as the last sad rites were being performed over her who had died beloved by every one, but unknown, as it were, and a stranger to all. It was sadder still at the grave, where the sobs of the poor might be heard as they buried the friend from whom it seemed that they could not part. As they turned from the cemetery more than one voice was heard, saying truthfully, "that another saint was in Heaven." Her grave was long kept fresh and green by her friends, and was soon marked by a small marble slab erected by them. On it was written these words: "Margaret Conroy, died May 22, 18—, aged 66 years," and below this, "May she rest in peace."

CHAPTER II.

FIVE years later a party of wealthy Irish tourists arrived in the quiet little village where Margaret lived and died. What had prompted them to visit such an out of the way and uninteresting place nobody knew. They seemed to have stopped there through mere chance, and the town was so pleasant and quiet in comparison to some of the large cities they had visited that they decided to remain there and rest awhile before going farther. One evening two of them were strolling through the cemetery when one of them, a young lady, stopped at Margaret's grave, and reading the inscription on the tombstone, called to an elderly gentleman, whom she called father, and pointing to it said: "I think we have found her at last!"

"Who?" asked her father, putting on his glasses to read the inscription. His face turned pale, he read the name several times to make sure that there was no mistake. "Yes Margaret," he said more to himself than to his daughter, "the name and age is the same as hers, but there are doubtless many Margaret Conroy's in the world."

"The parish priest might give us some infor-

mation concerning the woman," suggested his daughter, "at any rate it would do no harm to call on him and ask him."

"I will call on the priest this evening," said her aged companion, "I cannot rest until I do."

Margaret, for that was the girl's name, glanced over to the rectory, which was across the street, and seeing the priest sitting alone on the veranda, said, "There he is, father, and as no one is with him we might go over now."

The old gentleman read the inscription again, then turned and walked across the street with his daughter. Father Wilson, who had seen them at Mass the Sunday before and had heard much about them from his visitors, gave them a cordial welcome. When he learned the object of their visit, he was somewhat surprised, and hesitated at first to tell anything of Margaret's history excepting what was known by all of her friends.

When Father Wilson had finished, the gentleman asked if he could tell him where he could find any of the books or pictures which Margaret had left.

"Yes," said Father Wilson, "she left everything to me when she died to do with as I wished. Her books and two of her pictures I kept, but her furniture, clothes and such things I gave to a poor family who lost everything by fire a short

time after her death."

"May I see what you have belonging to her?" asked the stranger.

"Certainly," answered the priest, "come in and I will show them to you," and Father Wilson led the way into the parlor, wondering why this stranger should be so interested in Margaret Conroy. "There," he said, pointing to the picture of "Our Mother of Sorrows" which hung on the wall, "that was her favorite picture and I have kept it partly as a remembrance of her and partly because it is such a fine work of art."

The gentleman put on his glasses and carefully examined the picture for a few minutes, then gave his companion a look which seemed to say, "I think we have found her," and turning to the priest he said, "That is certainly a very fine work of art."

"Yes," said the priest, "and I prize it very highly, but here is another painting which is a most perfect picture of herself, only it is a little old style and the lady is dressed much more richly than my friend ever did. She told me it was her mother's picture and I think that no daughter ever could bear a stronger resemblance to her mother than she did."

The stranger looked at the picture for a few

minutes, and tears filled his eyes. Turning from the portrait he said, "That woman is my mother, too, and Margaret Conroy was my only sister, but please show me the books."

The priest looked at him in amazement, then at his companion who stood motionless at his side, gazing at her grandmother's picture, and he noticed that the girl bore almost as strong a resemblance to the portrait as Margaret had. He stepped over to a well-filled book case and selecting a few small books handed them to the gentleman.

After carefully examining each book, he laid them on the table and said to his daughter, "Thank God, we have found her at last, even though she is dead. These are the same books she took with her." He was now so fully overcome that he could say no more for a few minutes, but when he regained his self-possession he told the following story, to which Father Wilson listened with a strange interest, and which I will give in my own words:

Years ago a very wealthy and aristocratic Irish family had lived in a pleasant village near Dublin. They had two children, a son named Charles and a daughter, Margaret, four years younger. Margaret had always been the favorite of her parents as well as of all strangers who knew her, because

she had such winning ways combined with a most lovable disposition and was kind to everyone; while her brother, on the other hand, was stern, haughty and commanding in his ways. He felt his position in the world and wished to make everyone else feel it and honor him on account of it. In fact, he was one of those who make few friends and cannot keep those few long. Knowing this too well, he early conceived a dislike for his little sister, who was so unlike him in all things, and many times the wrath caused by well-earned snubs received from those whom he thought should pay him homage fell on her innocent head. Charles had always been a source of the greatest anxiety to his parents, especially his mother, who died when he was sixteen and Margaret twelve.

Shortly after her mother's death Margaret was sent to a noted convent in England, where she remained eight years until she finished her education, graduating with highest honors. She returned home with no other hopes than to make a good and worthy mistress of her father's home and to fill her mother's place; she had been at home but a few weeks, however, when all of her hopes were crushed for her father died, leaving her with no near relative and no one to care for her excepting her brother. In him all the bad

habits of his youth had increased as he grew to manhood, and he was a poor protector for the young girl who had no one else to look to as a friend. He had grown extremely jealous of her during her absence, and her gentle lady like appearance, which won so many friends for her on her return, strengthened this feeling.

As the weeks passed, her company, instead of being a source of pleasure to him, became more and more odious, and he wished to rid himself of her and also get possession of her part of the estate. He set about this in a most artful way. Changing from his former surliness, he became one of the most affectionate of brothers to her, while she overjoyed to see what she thought was a reform in him, she returned the purest of sisterly affections, having the greatest confidence in him and never for a moment suspecting any evil. Fully understanding this confidence and taking advantage of it, her artful brother found it easy to persuade her to let him sell her part of the property, as well as his own, to a man who was very anxious to buy the entire estate and had offered a large price for it. He told her that their home was so lonely without their parents that he could not live in it much longer and promised to go to America, where they would make their future home.

The next week Margaret received an invitation to travel on the continent with some friends, but would not have accepted it had not her brother insisted upon her going. He said that he would probably not be ready to leave home for a few months, and there were several things to be attended to yet, and in the meantime she could not spend her time better than by seeing some of the beautiful countries from which she was soon to be separated by the Atlantic. He was with her when she finished packing her last trunk preparatory for her trip, and had noticed that among other things she put in a few religious books. He had laughed at her for taking them and said that she was too pious, but she took no heed of his words. He had taken particular notice of them and saw that there were six, three of which had a peculiar binding. They had been one of her last presents from her mother, and her name was written in them in her well-known handwriting, while in the others Margaret herself had written her name. These were the same books that Father Wilson now brought forth to show to her brother. The picture of "Our Mother of Sorrows" had been painted by his sister during the last year she had spent in school, and her mother's portrait had been given to her by her dear parent when a child, and

she prized these so highly that she did not wish to leave them at home when she went away, so she packed them in one of her trunks.

About three months later, while Margaret was enjoying a very pleasant visit with some old schoolmates in Switzerland, she received a letter from her brother, saying that he had been obliged to vacate his home sooner than he had expected, and was about to sail that day for New York, where he hoped soon to make a home for her and would then return to Europe for her. Four weeks after he wrote this letter he sent another from Boston, where he had just arrived, telling her that he wished her to visit some of the American cities with him before purchasing a home, and promising to let her make her own choice in the place of their future residence. He said that she might join him as soon as she wished, but not to shorten her visit on his account, as he could find plenty of enjoyment with which to while away the time until she came.

He remained in Boston until he received a letter from her stating the time that she would meet him there. He then left the city and went to New York, where he remained until it was time for her to arrive in Boston, when he sailed for England. As she knew the name of the hotel where he was

stopping, he knew that if he did not meet her as he had promised, she would make inquiries for him there. Before leaving New York he sent a letter back to the hotel conveying the news of his sudden death in that city, and the name of a well-known physician, who was well paid for the fraud, was signed to the letter. He even went so far as to state where he had been buried in one of the New York cemeteries. The grave, supposed to be his; was the resting place of an unknown man, who had died in the alms-house about that time.

After this he spent several years enjoying, or trying to enjoy, his ill-gotten wealth in different parts of Europe. He had married in the meantime, and while not traveling, made his home in the northern part of Ireland, where he lived for several years in luxury, but not in happiness, for the sweet face of his sister he had wronged was continually haunting him. He never visited his native town, for he was as dead to all whom he had known as he was to Margaret. He kept his secret for years, until his son and two daughters had grown up, but when he saw in his own girls the image of his sister, he could keep silent no longer and told it to his wife and children, hoping to find relief in having someone know the wrong he had done. He would willingly have traveled all over the world and

given all his wealth to find her now, but as it had been many years since she went away, he had no hope of ever seeing or hearing from her again. His mind was a little freer, now that his family shared his secret—that was all.

It was not so with his younger daughter, a lovely girl of nineteen, who for her aunt bore the name of Margaret, and who grew so much more like her each day that her father almost felt that his sister had come back to his home with all the charming ways of her youth, while he, her proud brother, had grown old during her absence. Margaret had the most brilliant hopes that the aunt, of whom she had often heard in her childhood, and who her father had always until now told her had died before his marriage, might still be living and they could find her. She told her father of her hopes, begging him to go to America in search of her, and her sister joined in her entreaties; so after some time he gave his consent to go the next summer, more to please his daughters than for any other motive.

They spent several months in the United States, lingering longer in the New England States than any where else, because that was where Margaret had gone, and making inquiries every where, which, as might be expected, were utterly fruit-

less. Any attempt to find her seemed rather an absurdity, for after so many years of separation her brother might have met her face to face without recognizing her, and to what avail for him to inquire for Margaret Conroy; as she had in all probability married years ago or perhaps entered a convent, as her brother had thought her intentions to be when she was young. In either case it would be equally difficult to find her. They returned home knowing no more than when they left. The father was more reconciled now, because he had tried to find his sister, but still his daughter, Margaret, insisted that they had not searched enough.

A few years passed, and again the Conroy's, with the exception of the son, who was married and gone to England, visited the new world. Mr. Conroy felt that he was too old to cross the ocean again, but Margaret's persuasions were too much for him to resist. She insisted, the same as before, that they might find her aunt, then a longing seized him to see her before he died, and ask her forgiveness for the injury he had done her. He left home with a prayer that his daughter's hopes might be fulfilled. Alice, the older daughter, accompanied them as a bride, and it was on her husband's account that they visited

Maine, but it was only by mere chance that they happened to stop at the place where Margaret Conroy had lived and died.

The old gentleman was deeply touched by what Father Wilson had told him of the saintly life and death of his sister. The sun had already set when he left the rectory, but he returned to the cemetery, and falling upon his sister's grave wept long and bitterly, the first tears he had shed since the death of his mother. Margaret knelt beside him in silence, feeling that even she, his own child, had no business to intrude upon his secret sorrow by trying to offer words of consolation. At last as the deep shadows began to fall, Margaret, feeling that the evening air was too damp for her father to be out in, laid her hand gently on his shoulder and said, "Come father, let us go home now, as it is getting too late for us to remain here." At the sound of her voice he started up as if aroused from a deep slumber, and taking her arm walked silently back to the hotel.

A few days later Mr. Conroy bade a last, long farewell to the grave of his sainted sister, and ere long the ocean separated him once more from her resting place. Before the party left the village they had the little altar of the Blessed Virgin, before which she had so often prayed, replaced by a

beautiful marble one, as a tribute to her memory. They knew that if she were there and could make her wishes known, that she would be better pleased with that than with the most beautiful monument they could erect over her grave, and they would not disturb the tombstone which her friends had given her.

CHAPTER III.

THE rest of the story, which Margaret had told Father Wilson shortly before her death, was this: “A short time after receiving her brother’s message to join him in Boston, she left her friends and hastened thither, being very happy to think that she would so soon be with him, but was greatly surprised to find he was not there to meet her. “Perhaps he did not understand when I was to be here,” she thought, and she went to the hotel in quest of him. At first the proprietor pretended not to know who he was, then, after some little hesitation, he told her to wait in the parlor until he looked over the register for his name. He soon returned with the letter containing the news of her brother’s death, which he had received a few days before.

Margaret was so overcome with grief that she could not finish reading the letter. She had never before been alone or felt that she had no protector, but now, finding herself a stranger, alone in a strange land, with neither friends nor money (for she had spent nearly all that she had, with hopes of getting more from her brother on her ar-

rival) she knew not what to do. At first she thought of asking advice of the proprietor of the hotel, but he was so frigid in his manner toward her that she wished to leave him as soon as possible, and besides she did not wish to put too much confidence in a stranger.

Leaving the hotel with the letter in her hand, she went out on the street, so overcome with grief that she walked on knowing not, and hardly caring where her steps might lead. Soon she saw before her a large church whose steeple was surmounted by a golden cross, and when she saw that the door was open, her heart rose within her, and she entered. In this strange land she felt that she was not altogether forsaken, for under the sacramental veil on the altar rested the same God who dwells in so many sanctuaries on the dear old Irish soil, and He is ever ready to listen to the prayers of his children here as there. The young girl prayed most earnestly for guidance as to what to do in her hour of loneliness, and while there it occurred to her that she might find a friend in the parish priest, so she called on him.

Father Kelly was not at home, but the house-keeper invited her in, telling her that he would be there in a few minutes. When he came he received her very kindly, and as soon as she saw his

pleasant face and heard his welcoming words, she felt that she had certainly found in him one who would be a true friend, and she told her story to him as she would to an old friend. He took great interest in the poor friendless orphan and promised to do all that he could to help her. He feared that there might be foul play somewhere, and that her brother might, perhaps, have been murdered by someone who wished to get possession of his money. He said nothing of his fears to her, however, but did all that he could to console and encourage her. He would not permit her to return to the hotel, but took her to the home of a respectable Catholic family, where she was to remain until something more definite was learned of her brother's death, and her property found.

Several letters were written to New York, but the physician, whose name was signed to the letter the hotel keeper had received, was the only one who could give any information. All that he could tell was of his sudden death and burial, but nothing could be learned of what had become of his property. Letters were also sent to Ireland, but to no more purpose. He had left his old home several months before, after having sold everything, and had taken all of his wealth with him, and nothing had been heard from him since.

In the meantime Father Kelly had obtained Margaret a position as governess of three small children in a Catholic family, and she remained with them six years, until the mother died and the home was broken up, the children being sent to a boarding-school. Caring for nothing but the welfare of her pupils, she had become a great favorite in the family, and the Father would gladly have found her another place, but she refused to accept the offer, thanking him for his kindness.

Her motive for refusing to accept the offer was that she longed to be alone where, unknown, she could spend her life in the service of her Creator, doing good to others and working for the salvation of her own soul. As her brother had often suspected, it had been her one desire, when young, to enter a convent, but when her parents died and she was left alone with him, she intended to remain with him until he was married, which she hoped would be soon ; then when she was free she would join a religious order, but now it occurred to her that by living a solitary life in the world and working for the poor, she might save her soul in a way that would be pleasing to her Creator.

She had already given a large part of her earnings to the poor, but she still had quite a sum left, which paid her fare to a pleasant village in the

southern part of Maine. She rented the small rooms which she occupied for some time, and what money she had left she put away for the poor, while she went to look for sewing with which to support herself. She was not long in finding the poor and needy of the parish, and during the many years that she spent among them she never forgot them, but worked on with untiring zeal. She found, too, when her work was done, a little leisure time to devote to her pen, and during these spare hours she translated a few works from the original French, which brought her a small income, but this was a work which she did without the knowledge of any of her friends, for she wished to appear ignorant among them.

Her life, like the lives of many others who try to make sacrifices for God's sake, was not without its temptations. During the first few years her mind would often wander back to her old home and the many friends of her youth; then to the happy air castle she had built in her childhood, before going to the convent to school; of future joys surrounded by wealth, luxury and gay friends. She thought, too, of a brilliant offer of marriage which she had rejected while traveling in Europe, and of another while governess in Boston, and almost wished sometimes that she had married and made

for herself the beautiful home which she might have had, combined with the companionship of a true and noble husband. She would compare these with her present condition alone among strangers and far from the home of her childhood. She knew that her superior education would enable her in a short time to pay her passage back to Ireland, and she would probably find there many of her old friends and distant relatives who would give her a hearty welcome to the dear old soil. She longed too, to see the scenes so dear to her in childhood and to visit the graves of her parents. As she began to grow old, she wished that she were where, in death, she might have the privilege of sleeping beside them in the churchyard so far away.

The thought that the ocean rolled between her and their resting place made the temptation much stronger, but she conquered it by saying to herself that it was God's will that she should be brought to this strange land, and thanked Him for giving her so excellent an opportunity to live for others and save her own soul without having the eyes of the busy and malicious world ever upon her.

Beautiful was her life and happy her death. There are martyrs in these latter days as there

were in the early ages. Their sacrifices are no less great, their lives are as holy. Margaret Conroy earned her crown, and we cannot doubt that she wears it.

THE END

OF

THE NEW ENGLAND HERMIT.

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AIR CASTLES

OR THE

School-girls' Prophecies.

CHAPTER I.

IT was the twentieth of January and a cold stormy day it had been, but what difference did that make to the young lady boarders at St. Agnes' Academy in T——. They had faced the storm and gone out for their daily promenade, which, on this afternoon, had been a very short one, but the chilly air had only made them feel fresher and better prepared for the hour and a quarter's study before them on their return. Study was over now, so was the rosary which was recited immediately after it; the boarders had also been to supper, and with the exception of a few of

the more pious members of the school, who had gone to the chapel for a few minutes private devotion, the girls had gone to what was known as the "recreation room."

This was a spacious and pleasant hall on the third floor of the building, used for all entertainments and meetings of the school, but its every day use was as a recreation hall for the boarders during the winter and when the weather prevented their spending their leisure hours on the lawn. From this it derived its name. In one end was a stage, in front of which were two pianos, while on each side were two long tables used by the classes in drawing, painting and needlework. And this room, like every other place of interest, had its registry book which, although kept in a secluded place, was much used by the students here as well as in every other large school. It was nothing more or less than the wood work around the stage which, being out of sight, had been left unpainted, with the white backs of the canvas scenes. Of course, as every student should know, when anything was written here it was always done on the sly, but that did not prevent their being covered with pencil marks and if it could be known how some of these marks came to be here, some interesting stories might be told

that would recall to mind many of those who had been students here years before but were now gone, who can tell where, and perhaps forgotten by many of the old friends.

To-night we find eight of our older girls dancing a quadrille in one end of the room, the gentlemen being distinguished by handkerchiefs tied on their arm; at one of the tables a group of girls are playing games and another group are telling stories; here is a more industrious girl who is trying to finish a piece of fancy work, while two or three more have been selfish enough to leave their companions for the more interesting society of books, and the smaller girls have taken their places on the stage to rehearse their new original play to a very uninterested audience. As we look over this assemblage of young girls, we see such unity and happiness between them that we almost think they are one great family of sisters instead of children of so many different families, from various places, for such is the condition in convent boarding schools that none of the girls seem to be strangers to each other.

Sitting beside the grand piano, are three girls in whom we are more interested than in any of the others. They appear to be deeply interested in a conversation which they are carrying on in a low

tone and which they evidently do not intend shall be heard. Always looking for some new amusement with which to pass the recreation hour, it had occurred to one of them to spend it building air castles—an idea which pleased her two best friends. Each was to tell where she expected to be twelve years from that day.

Bessie Arnold, the oldest of the trio, a bright, dark eyed girl who had just passed her fifteenth birthday, was the first to tell her story. She, unlike the others, was not a Catholic, and was the only child of very wealthy and worldly parents whose home was in a small village in Western Pennsylvania. From her infancy she had been idolized by both father and mother, surrounded by every luxury that money could buy and brought up to think only of the bright side of life, and the time when she hoped to become a society belle. Her parents' only object was to make her a brilliant woman of the world. There being no school in their town where she could obtain an education suitable to her rank, they had kept her under the care of a governess until the opening of the last fall's term of school, when they sent her to St. Agnes' Academy, where she was to remain until she finished. Despite all the petting she had received at home, she was not spoiled, and by her

bright cheerful ways soon won many friends in school.

Agnes Wilson, the next, although only a few weeks younger than Bessie, appeared by her size to be not over twelve years old, but one glance at her sweet, though not handsome, face and soft grey eyes, would make you think her much older. Poor Agnes, her young life had been almost as full of darkness as Bessie's had of sunshine. One of the first things she remembered, was how, when about four years old, she and a brother two years older, had been brought home, after being away for some time, and her weeping father had held them in his arms to gaze for the last time on the face of their mother as she lay in her coffin. The children went to live with their grandmother, and about a year later both had scarlet fever, from which the boy died and poor little Agnes was left in a condition almost worse for her than death would have been. She had not quite recovered when, being left alone one day, she started to go down stairs to find her brother, whom she missed from her room. She was hardly strong enough to bear her weight, and fell down stairs, injuring her right limb so badly that she was laid up for several months, and it was feared she would never walk again. When she was able to move about with the aid of

crutches, the prospects were that she would be crippled for life. She was ten years old, when happily, she was able to lay aside one crutch, and might have recovered after a time had she not caught cold in the diseased limb, causing rheumatism, with which she was laid up for another year. Her father then placed her under the care of a skilled surgeon in a hospital, where she underwent a severe operation and spent many dreary weeks. It was during her many hours of suffering that the little girl acquired the most heroic patience, which she never lost, and which was to mark her career in after life, and won for her much affection from all who knew her well.

The little girl's happiest dreams had been of the time when she would be old enough to keep house for her father, who, after her brother's death, had been her only idol, and while lying motionless in her little bed or sitting in her chair unable to rise, many weary hours had been whiled away in planning what she would do to make her home pleasant. Never once did it occur to her that there was any possibility of anyone else ever enjoying that privilege, for was she not all that her father had to care for? A disappointment awaited her even here, for a short time before she was to leave the hospital her father told her that he had married

again. This grieved her more than all her sufferings had, and she dreaded to go home and find another in her mother's place ; and she begged her father to send her to boarding school, where she might fit herself for a teacher.

“My father's new wife may be very kind to him,” she said to one of her friends at the hospital, “and I hope she will, but I do not want to go home and find her in mamma's place.”

Her father took her home for a while, but seeing that she was not contented, placed her in St. Agnes' Academy, where she had since remained spending her vacations there, and which she felt was the only home she had ever known.

Grace Warren, the youngest of the three, was not quite fourteen, and a sweeter, lovelier girl had never been seen at the Academy. She was one of those whose presence seems to shed a ray of sunshine wherever they go and whose friendship is sought and prized by all. Indeed, she seemed to live only to love and to be loved. Grace had lost her mother when she was only six years old, and her father giving her to the care of the Sisters, had broken up his home and stored some of his best things, with hopes of again keeping house when his little girl was old enough to be mistress of it, but not before, for while gazing on the face of his

dead wife he had promised that no woman, excepting her own child, should ever be queen of his home, and so far he had kept that promise.

Bessie had just commenced her story when the door opened, and Laura Murphy, a pretty blue-eyed girl of about fourteen, entered and without thinking that she was intruding upon a secret conversation, walked over to our young friends and said, "Well, girls, what are you so interested in?"

Bessie laughed and answered, "Since it is you, Laura, I suppose we shall have to let you into it, but it is to be a secret just among ourselves. Sit down and I will tell you about it, that is if the other girls don't object."

"Oh, certainly not," said Grace and Agnes, "we are glad to have you share our secret with us," and Grace pushed toward her a big willow chair that sat beside the piano.

Laura was an orphan, her father having been killed by a falling building when she was scarcely three weeks old, and the shock of his sudden death had caused her mother's death. The mother, in dying, had placed her in her only sister's arms, telling her to care for her until she was old enough to go to school, then send her to the convent, where they themselves had received their education. Less than three years later the sister died, leaving the

child at St. Agnes', where she had since remained ; so Laura had grown up with the Sisters, knowing no other home than the convent, and finding there a most happy and peaceful abode. Laura inherited from her mother a deep love for her religion ; she was marked for her piety among her companions, and seemed to spend more time in the chapel than any of the other girls. It was from there she had just come, being, as was often the case, the last one to join the girls in the recreation hall.

After telling Laura what the secret was to be, Bessie began :

“ First, I shall remain here until I finish, which I expect to do when I am about nineteen. After that I expect to go to Europe with papa and mama and spend a year seeing the sights of the Old World, and may spend another year or two studying music in Germany. On our return home, I hardly know what I shall do, but I suppose I shall be obliged to remain most of the time in our own little village, although it is so dull I can hardly content myself there, and I prefer city life. I hope to visit some and have lots of company, so I won't be very lonely. Twelve years from to-day I expect to be married to some very wealthy man and living in a beautiful home of my own in

Baltimore or Philadelphia. I shall spend the winters entertaining guests, and I hope to see many of my old school friends from here among them and I shall attend all of the leading balls and operas. A few weeks in the summer I shall spend with my parents, for it is quite pleasant at our home in the summer, and the rest of the time I expect to be at some fashionable summer resort, or at the seaside. Of course, I do not intend to spend all of my time thus, for even such a life as that would become monotonous, and I think too much of seeing other parts of the world and will travel some. Perhaps spend a few weeks in the West one year, and another time go to Europe or South America."

Thus the light-hearted girl who had never known the slightest care talked listlessly on for some time, describing the pleasures she believed to be in store for her, plainly showing what a sunny nature she had and how she had been brought up in perfect harmony with her natural disposition.

When Bessie had finished, Agnes began by telling how diligently she would study, as her companions well knew she had done since she had been in school with them, and would try to surpass all of her class-mates, unless it were Laura in catechism, she added laughingly, for Laura

was often seen outside the study hall with her catechism in her hands and had never been known to fail in one lesson from it. Among her companions she was often called the little nun. After graduating here, Agnes would go to some college or training school to fit herself for a teacher and also perfect herself in the Latin, French and German languages. French being taught even in the lower grades at St. Agnes', she already understood it quite well and the other languages seemed easy for her. She would then seek a position in some large school for which she hoped to be well qualified after so many years of hard study. Twelve years hence she pictured herself in a large school room filled with advanced pupils who would look up to her as their teacher.

The girl's whole heart seemed to be wrapt up in this one ambition and to give it up would have cost her a great deal. One thing she had resolved, although she would not even hint it to her most intimate friends, was that she would never go home to live with the one who had taken her own dear mother's place. Her step-mother had always been kind to her, but she could not bear the thoughts of going home to live with her, while in her extreme sensitiveness she felt that her father, who now had another little girl to love,

would not care very much if she did not go home to live. By nature she was independent and this spirit prompted the resolution to do for herself. With the money left her by her mother, she intended to finish paying for her education as she had done since she came to the academy.

"I suppose it is my turn now," said Grace, "but I have very little to say. I never want to be any more or less than simply Grace Warren, and the greatest fame I could ever aspire to is to be papa's little house-keeper and make everything in our home as pleasant for him as I can. I do not think I would ever care to be any older than I am now, if papa would only make a home for us and let me go to keep house for him, but he says I am too young and must not think of such a thing until after I graduate which will not be until I am eighteen or nineteen. He has promised to have our old home re-furnished much as it was while mama was living. Twelve years from to-day I will be—let me see, almost twenty-six, just mama's age when she died, although it seems that I will never be that old the time is so far off. I wish I would never be any older than nineteen, for it seems as though I would be happier at that age, but anyway, if I must grow older I will be, oh, so happy, in our own dear home, just

papa and I, and when I think of it I sometimes wish that papa would not keep any servants, just so I could let him see how nice I could keep house for him without any help." But the little white hands that lie in her lap did not look as if they could ever do any work. "If mama could only be with us," she added, a tear trembling on her eyelid at the thought of the fair young mother whom she could just remember; "but I will think of her very often and try to make up to papa for her absence."

"It is just like you, Grace," said Agnes, "to want to remain a little girl all your life."

"Now Laura," said Bessie, "we will see what you have to say of your plans for the future. I see by your face that you would like to leave us after hearing what the rest of us had to say. We know well your old trick of trying to escape saying anything about yourself; but you can't do it this time, so hurry and tell us before the bell rings."

Laura laughed a silvery little laugh to see that Bessie had read her thoughts so accurately and said: "Well, girls, I have but one desire, and it is never to leave this convent, where I have spent all my life and have been so happy. I know that no other place would ever seem like home to me,

and twelve years from to-day, when you three are far away, you may think of me as being just where I am now. I hope to be more than one of the boarders then, and perhaps," she added, pointing to where the mistress of boarders sat behind a small table. "I may be sitting there watching a number of boarders just like the girls who are here to-night. If on the evening of the twentieth of January I see a group of girls sitting by this piano, my thoughts may wander back to the evening twelve years before, which four girls spent building air castles. By that time I shall probably know how many of them have fallen to decay."

A merry laugh followed Laura's remark. One of the girls suggested that they should write all that had been said in a little memoranda and keep it to look at in after years, as a reminder of how they had spent one pleasant evening while in school. Just then the bell for evening prayers rang, and the boarders were soon on their way to the chapel on the floor beneath.

The next morning four girls, who had finished their work in the dormitory before the others, stole down to the recreation room and went behind the scenes on the stage. No one saw them, and if they had they probably would not have

taken any notice of the names written on the back of one of the scenes. They were Bessie Arnold, Agnes Wilson, Grace Warren, Laura Murphy, the name of each girl written in her own handwriting, and below them the date, January 20, 1877.

CHAPTER II.

THE twelve years have passed and again it is the evening of the twentieth of January. But where to-night are our four young friends? Has any part of their prophecies come true, and, if so, who can guess what part?

Although Grace was the youngest, it is she that we will look after first. I will not ask you to visit her lonely home on this stormy night, for dreary as the aspect may seem even at the brightest time in the year, it will look more so now; so I will take you back to last June, when the flowers were all in bloom and everything in nature looked its loveliest. In the shade of a pink hawthorn tree in the Catholic cemetery at T—— are three green mounds. In the center of a wreath of half-opened lilies on the location stone at the head of the one in the center is the name “Grace,” the word “Mother” is on the one at the left, and “Father” on the one at the right, while on the tall monument in the corner of the lot is engraved the name of each, with their ages and the date of their death, Grace’s age being nineteen years.

Grace had always appeared to be in the very best of health until she was eighteen, when she began to look thinner and paler than usual, and had a slight cough, but this she attributed to hard study, as it was to be her last year in school, and she did extra work to keep ahead of her class. Little attention was given to it at first, for she would always try to choke back her cough until sometimes her eyes would fill with tears, and when asked if she were ill, she would always say that she felt quite well. So loath was she to give up to her sickness that she would hardly admit, even to herself, that she was not well. "What is the need of complaining," she would say to herself, "for a little rest is all I need and I will be all right after I leave here." When her father came to see her, as he did every Sunday, she would always try to keep him from noticing what she feared her pale face might betray by telling him of the enjoyments of her school life or of her progress in her studies, with which she said the Sisters were so well pleased. At other times she would talk of the beautiful home she soon hoped to enjoy with him, and which she would try to make so pleasant for him, until he would sometimes wonder what had come over his little girl, as he still called her, although she was now a tall,

handsome young lady, and a perfect image of his dead wife. Nevertheless, he greatly enjoyed hearing her talk in that way.

“How much more like her mother she grows every day,” he would sometimes say after he had been with her, “always cheerful and happy, just as she was, even after she knew that she must leave us.” His affection for his daughter and his confidence in all she said were so great that she succeeded in deceiving him until about the middle of January. His only thought had been that Grace was to graduate in the spring, and what happiness he would find in bringing her to the home which was already being prepared for her to enter it as mistress the day after she graduated. It was the Sister Superior who, like a mother, had watched the young girl, silently praying that her worst fears might not be realized, and, asking her very often if she felt well, to receive the same answer each time, “Very well, Sister.” She almost felt at times that Grace was deceiving her, and wished to speak of her health to her father, but knowing his affection for her, dreaded to cause him unnecessary grief. When she did mention it to him she did not dream that Grace was as weak as she was. A physician was consulted at once, who

said that she had consumption, and there was no hopes for her recovery, although she might live for many months, and possibly for years. It grieved her very much to have to give up school, even for a few weeks, when she was so near through, and when she did leave, it was with the understanding that after a little rest she was to come back and graduate in the spring. So intent was she upon this, that she had her father buy her graduating dress and had it made before she left the city. It was of pure white cashmere, trimmed with cream silk lace, and when she tried it on, to show it to her father, he said that he had never seen her look any more beautiful, but, alas, there was a sad misgiving in his mind that she would never wear it for the purpose for which it had been made.

Her father took her to Florida, hoping that the genial climate of that land of flowers might improve her health, and without his knowledge she had hid her school books in her trunk, to study while she was there, in order to keep up with her class, but she made little use of those books. The climate did not help her, and in less than two months she became so weak that she had to be brought home, and when the crocuses and hyacinths were just beginning to bloom she took to

her bed, and it was feared that in a few days she would be sleeping beneath them, but after much suffering, which she bore with angelic patience, she rallied and lived until the summer was over. Although quite weak, she was able to attend the commencement exercises at St. Agnes' Academy, and expressed her deepest regrets that she could not be one of the class, but still she had one great happiness, she was now living with her father in the dear home which she had longed for so long.

It was on the morning of the second of September that, after being confined to her own room for only a few days, she passed peacefully away, surrounded by her father, her pastor, and two of her old schoolmates, who had spent the night with her. The last words she spoke were words of encouragement to her father, and his was the last face she saw. In compliance with her own request, she wore her graduating dress for the first time when she was laid in her coffin, and her class, which numbered six that year, attended the funeral as honorary bearers. Her death was a great blow to her loving parent, who, after he had laid her beside her mother, visited their graves very often, remaining there for hours at a time, until little over a year after her death he was taken there for the last time and laid to rest beside the ones who

had been so dear to him.

Grace has her wish now, but how differently from what she had expected. She is with her father now and her mother, too, and she will always be just nineteen.

Leaving the graves under the hawthorn, we will next pay a visit to our friend, Agnes. She is no longer the weak, crippled child, we left her, but, although not very tall, a graceful young lady, whom no one could believe had ever made use of either crutch or cane. She finished at the academy as she had intended, graduating when she was but seventeen ; then went to a normal and training school where three years later she again graduated with high honors. For two years she taught in one of the public schools in the city, then accepted a position as preceptress and teacher of French and Latin in a fashionable boarding school in an eastern city. This was the height of her ambition and so eager was she for her work to begin, that she almost counted the days until vacation would be over. Even here, the young girl who seemed doomed to have all her brightest hopes crushed by disappointments, was to meet another.

School was to open the second week in September, and Agnes was preparing for her departure, when her step-mother died quite suddenly, leaving

five small children, the oldest a girl seven years old and the youngest a boy but a few weeks old. It was hard for Agnes to think of giving up the position she had obtained by such hard and faithful study, and her father knowing how much she prized it, would not even allude to such a thing, but told her that he intended breaking up house-keeping, placing his two oldest girls in St. Agnes' Academy, and the others in a Sisters' foundling asylum. Agnes could not think of consenting to this, for, as she told herself, they were her father's children and it was her duty to care for them, now that they had no mother, remembering at the time how she herself had been left motherless at a tender age. It was with an aching heart and without her father's knowledge that she wrote to the principal of the school saying that she had decided to give up her position, as her services were needed at home.

This done, she entered cheerfully upon the work which was so different from what she had anticipated but a few weeks before—keeping house for her father and caring for his children as tenderly as their own mother could have done. Even now she could not give up her ambition to teach, so she opened a kindergarten in her own home, which was attended by a large class of the chil-

dren of wealthy parents.

Sickness rendered baby Arthur very cross and fretful from the first, so that he demanded constant care until winter, when he died. His sufferings had caused his half-sister to be very much attached to him, so that she felt his loss deeply. In the summer the children had the scarlet fever, and had it not been for Agnes' most tender care, two of them would have died, but nothing, however, could save Alice, the second oldest, a very sickly child. She did her double work most faithfully, with no help excepting from a young girl who looked after the younger children while she was teaching. To-night we find our young friend in her father's home surrounded by a group of four little girls who think there is no one like dear sister Agnes, while Agnes, on the other hand, when she thinks of her old ambition to teach, often tells her friends that she would not give up one of her dear little sisters or her class of little ones for the highest position in any school in the country.

We will now return to the recreation room at St. Agnes, which we left twelve years ago to-night. The boarders are amusing themselves much as they were that evening, but there are more of them now, for the academy has been en-

larged since then. The room and many of the objects look familiar to us, but the faces are all strange excepting one. As we gaze around the room, our eyes rest upon the young nun who sits behind the table reading a letter, and we know now that Laura's prophecy has come true—for there we see her just where she said she would be. Laura has at last reached that state of life for which she had prayed from her infancy and I doubt if in the whole city there are any happier than she.

She graduated when she was eighteen and at the earnest request of her guardian went to his home to spend a few months. To please him (although it cost her a great effort, against her own will) she entered society the following winter with his daughter, who was about her own age. The pleasures in which she was obliged to indulge for several weeks were even greater than what the light-hearted Bessie Arnold had prophesied were in store for herself. Laura won many friends by her sweet, simple manners, which are a marked characteristic of those brought up in the convent, and her company was much sought after, but she longed to leave them all and return to the quiet home which had been the only one she could remember. In the spring she accompanied her

friends to Europe and remained in their company for a year, spending the following winter in Paris, where much of her time was passed in social enjoyments.

Wearied of this gay life in which she never found any pleasure, she sought admission to a convent in France, where she continued her studies until she was twenty-one. She then returned home and entered upon her novitiate at the mother-house of the Order which had charge of St. Agnes' Academy. She remained there until last summer, when she was sent as a teacher to the academy where both her mother and herself had received their education. The mistress of boarders being engaged elsewhere this evening, she had taken her place and it almost seemed, as she gazed at the happy faces before her, that she saw not the present boarders but those she had known in by-gone days.

But what is it that brings those dear old faces so vividly before her mind to-night? It is the letter she has been reading and which is written in a hand which she knows well, although it has been a long time since she had seen that handwriting before. The letter by turn had brought both tears and smiles to her face. It was from her old friend, Bessie Arnold—not Bessie Arnold

now but Mrs Ellsworth.

Bessie had remained at the academy about a year and a half after we last saw her, and was then called home on account of the illness of her mother who died a few days after her arrival. She did not return to school but the following spring accompanied her father on a visit to California. While in San Francisco they stopped with an old acquaintance named Ellsworth who had a son just graduated from an eastern college. The young man would have married Bessie then, but as she was only seventeen her father thought she was too young. She returned home with her father and kept house for him until the summer after her twentieth birthday, when young Mr. Ellsworth came to her home to claim her as his bride, and took herself and her father to an elegant new home he had prepared for them in Los Angeles, Cal. There she lived as a queen, mistress of the domain of which she was so well worthy, almost worshipped by one of the most devoted of husbands, and there we find her as happy after six years and a half of married life as when she first entered her home a bride.

At the time of her marriage she had lost all track of Laura, who was then in Europe, and had not heard from her until a few days ago, when a

friend from T—— who was visiting her told her of the young nun who had already won so many friends among the students and visitors at St. Agnes' Academy.

Bessie wrote to her immediately, telling her all that had taken place since she last heard from her, describing her home and sending her the photos of her little five-year-old girl and three-year-old boy, who were perfect images of their mother. She spoke of their happy school days and, "Dear sister," she wrote, "I was quite amused, while looking through some of my old school books a few days ago, to find a little memoranda written full, with the leaves pinned together. Curious to know what it was, I read it and found that it contained the prophecies of four school-girls, whom you perhaps were acquainted with, and bore the date of January 20, 1877. My mind wandered back to the dear old recreation room, and I could almost see again that happy group about whom I have so often thought, and especially dear Grace, after whom I have named my little girl. When I think of her I almost think that she was too sweet and good for the trials of this life and as I read in my memoranda her part of that prophecy, there was something so sad about it that it strikes me now she knew her life would

be short. Think how she said that night it did not seem as though she would ever be twenty-six. I could not wish our dear friend back for I trust she is happier than we, but I hope God will spare my dear Grace longer than He did her.

“I almost forgot to tell you, dear Sister,” she wrote in conclusion, “that my husband is a Catholic and with him, I am now a happy member of your own church which I thought so strange while in school. I know how to appreciate your faith now and I am very happy to know that you, my dear friend, have chosen to spend your whole life in the convent where we once saw so many happy days together.”

Bessie brought her long letter to a close as she had begun it, in that light, cheerful style, which showed plainly that, although a wife and mother, she was as free from care as when we last saw her a happy school girl of fifteen.

The names of the girls who spent one of their evenings building air castles may still be read on the back of the canvas scenes, where they were written by them, for this little story contains much truth as well as fiction.

THE END

OF AIR CASTLES, OR THE
THE SCHOOL-GIRLS' PROPHECIES.

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